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ABSTRACT

This Information Notebook is part of a total packet of learning materials on the heritage of Southern agrarians. It contains primary and secondary source readings and pictures describing the roots of Southern agrarians. It tells the story of people who lived in the rural South before, during, and following the Great Depression of the 1930s. The notebook is divided into eight sections: (1) Slavery, (2) Reconstruction, (3) Sharecropping and Tenancy, (4) Everyday Life, (5) Moving, (6) Southern Tenant Farmers Union, (7) New Deal, and (8) Technology. Some sections are followed by questions for discussion and recommended classroom activities. The notebook format was used to encourage students to include their own additional information, particularly materials that relate to their local settings. (Author/HK)

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INTRODUCTION

This Information Notebook is one part of the total packet of learning materials on the heritage of Southern Agrarians. The Notebook contains readings and pictures describing the roots of Southern Agrarians. It is a story of the men, women and children who spent their lives in the rural South during and following the Depression Decade of the 1930's and of the people who worked and lived off the land.

If you grew up in the South, then more than likely your parents or grandparents or great-grandparents made their living off of the land and your roots are Southern Agrarian. Perhaps you have heard an occasional story about the "good old days" or even a story about "hard times." Many of you may have relatives still living on a farm.

Others who did not grow up in this region are also rooted in its history, for the Southern Agrarian heritage is shared by many people. The cities of Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati, Dayton, Philadelphia, and New York are filled with the sons and daughters of Southern Agrarians who left the farms to seek a better life in the factories of the Northern cities.



Today, in our technological society, the cotton farmer with a one-horse plow is a thing of the past. The cities and the factories have continued to call people from the farms. Still, a common heritage remains.

The purpose of these readings is to help you gain a sense of your own history, to see yourself and members of your family as participants in history. The readings in this Notebook are organized into 8 sections:

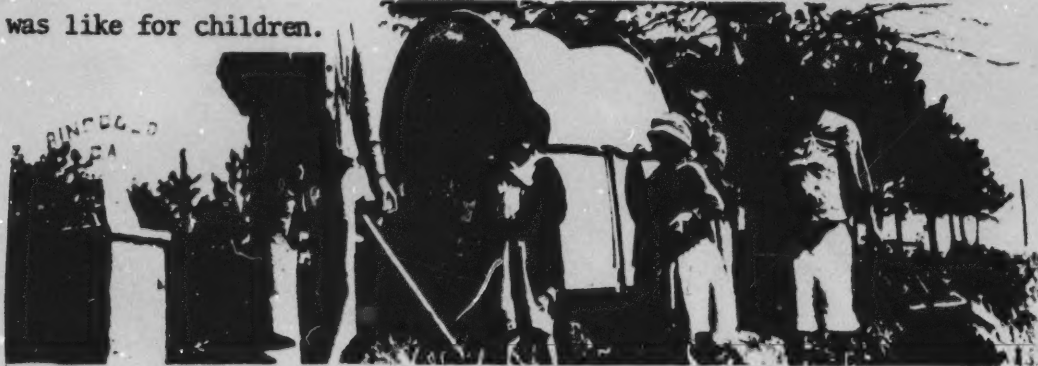
- I. Slavery
- II. Reconstruction
- III. Sharecropping and Tenancy
- IV. Everyday Life
- V. Moving
- VI. Southern Tenant Farmers Union
- VII. New Deal
- VIII. Technology

The first section of readings in this series focuses on the times of slavery. It is important to know that not all white people owned large plantations and had slaves. After the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, the lives of blacks and whites began to be more and more similar. Our purpose in this section, however, is to tell the story of the men and women who were bought and sold into slavery, and to try to understand what life on the plantation was like for them.



The readings in Section II focus on the period of Reconstruction. The readings deal primarily with the difficulty of "free" blacks following emancipation. It is in this period that the old system of slavery is replaced by a new landlord-tenant relationship called sharecropping. For the first time, however, landless whites and blacks find themselves in similar situations.

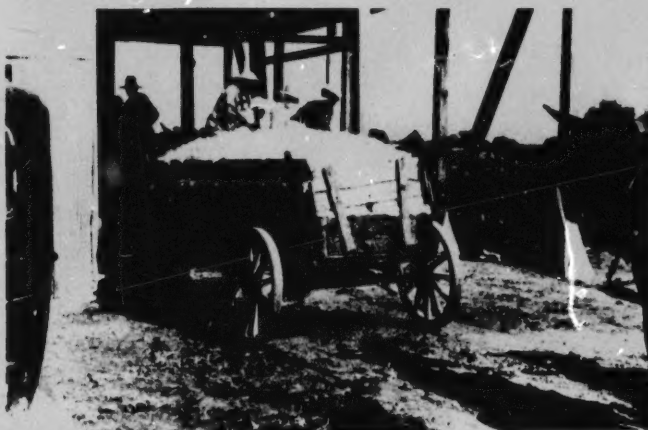
Section III moves from the Reconstruction period to the Depression decade of the 1930's. During this time, some 9 million people made their living as sharecroppers or tenants. The price of cotton had dipped drastically and times were hard for everyone. The readings in this section are to give you some basic information about how sharecropping worked, the number of people involved, and a description of the "furnish" system and what it was like for children.



Section IV begins with a series of readings written by sociologist Arthur Raper, in which he describes what life was like for the share-cropping family—the tools they used, the food they ate, and the churches and schools they attended. In his portrait of Seab and Kate Johnson, we can slowly begin to see the effects of poverty and perhaps begin to understand why the Johnsons might ask, "Why Bother?"

Section V consists of two stories about moving. Sharecroppers were in many ways similar to today's migrant farm laborers. When the crops were all in, and the "settling up" had been done, the family would often pick up and move on, always looking and hoping for a fair landlord and rich land.

Sections VI and VII show us how people responded to the Depression. In the first reading we hear about the formation of a black and white union that came out of the Arkansas Delta in the 1930's, and in the second series we see the attempt by President Roosevelt to establish national relief programs.



Section VIII moves us into a period of transition when large land-owners were beginning to replace mules with tractors and families were slowly being forced to leave the land.

What follows is not a history book but a series of articles and stories about the beginnings of the Southern Agrarian Lifestyle. These articles have been printed in notebook format to allow you to include additional information—particularly materials relevant to your local setting.

Let us now go back to a time and a place that seems remote and far-fetched, a time when factories and industry were not common-place, and when men, women and children were dependent on the land for a living. Let us return to another century to look at the South when the forest were just beginning to be cleared, and a small, furry white crop was just beginning to dominate the culture and its people.

COTTON

Cotton was well suited to the Southern climate and soil; moreover, the continuous expansion of the western frontier provided an abundance of rich growing land. The invention of the cotton gin increased the demand for the fiber from the textile towns of New England and Great Britain, thus making it a highly profitable crop for Southern planters. The cash received from its sale enabled planters to buy manufactured goods from the industrial North.

But perhaps more important than geography was the human factor. Cotton was a "labor intensive" crop, and slave labor was cheap. Once the purchase price had been paid, the owner was responsible for clothing, feeding, and housing his slaves. He did not, however, have to pay wages.



Cotton is a crop which drains the soil of plant food. When the fertility of the land was exhausted, the planter would acquire more land by simply moving westward. Slave labor was used in the winter months to clear forest lands for cultivation the following year. Thus cotton, which began in the Virginias and Carolinas, steadily moved westward.

This combined accessibility of free labor and land was a powerful force in the developing region. For the next one hundred years, the people—black and white, slave and free—would live under the long shadow of King Cotton.

THEY SAY THAT FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE
 THEY SAY THAT FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE
 THEY SAY THAT FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE
 OH LORD, WE MUST BE FREE, WE MUST BE FREE

- Old Slave Song

I. SLAVERY



SLAVERY

The two selections that follow are taken from interviews with former slaves. They were conducted by the Federal Writers Project in the late 1930's. Mrs. Lizzie Williams is from Mississippi. Mr. Elige Davison is from Virginia. Elige "walked" to Texas after freedom.

Interview with...

LIZZIE WILLIAMS

"I was 88 years old de furst day o' dis past June. Was born in Grenada county, five miles dis side [east] o' Graysport.

"My Mammy was Mary [Pass] Williams an' I had fourteen brothers an' sisters but deys all dead now 'cept me.

"My Marsa was Capt. Jack Williams an Capt. Jacks Mammy, Miss Lourena Williams, was my Missus. Capt. Jack, he never did marry. He owned 'bout 1400 acres land, ten or fifteen grown nigger men what was called de plowhands an' lots o' fifteen an' sixteen year old boys 'sides de women an chillun.

"Back in dem days we lived in little log houses dobbed with mud an' had dirt floors. Dey was covered with boards an' waited down with plank to keep 'em from blowin' off. We slept on a quilt spread on de ground fo' our bed.

"My job back in dem days was to weave, spin thread, run de loom, an durin crop time I plowed an' hoed in de field. My mammy was a regular field hand.

"Marsa he was good to us niggers, he never would whip us. De overseers was a Mr. Gentry, Vanvoosa an' Iamilton an' dey would sho get holt o' us if we didn't work to suit em.

"Dey didn't give us nothin much to eat. Dey was a trough out in de yard what dey pured de mush an milk in an us chillun an de dogs would all crowd 'round it an eat together. Us chillun had homemade wooden paddles to eat with an we sho' had to be in a hurry 'bout it cause de dogs would get it all if we didn't. Heep o' times we'd eat coffee grounds fo' bread. Sometimes we'd have biscuits made out o' what was called de 2nd's. De white folks allus got de 1st's. De slaves didn't have no gardens but ole Missus gave us onion tops out o' her garden.

"We sho didn't have 'nuff clothes to wear back in slavery days neither. De ole shoe maker on de place made every nigger one pair shoes a year an' if he wore 'em out he didn't get no more. I's been to de field many a frosty mornin' with rags tied 'round my feet.

"De overseer sent us to de field every mornin' by 4:00 o'clock an we stayed 'till after dark. By de time cotton was weighed up an supper cooked an et, it was midnight when we'd get to bed heep o' times. Dese overseers saw dat every nigger got his 'mount o' cotton. De grown ones had to pick 600, 700 an 800 pounds a day an' de 14 an 15 year old ones had to pick 400 an 500 pounds.

"Twasn't much sickness back in slavery days 'cept when de women was confined an' ole Missus an a nigger woman on de place tended to such cases. I 'member once my Mamma had to wash standin' in sleet an' snow knee deep when her baby was just three days old. It made her sick an she almost died. Dats de only

time dey ever was a doctor at any us nigger houses. Ole missus generally got Jerusalem weed out o' de woods an' made syrup out o' it to get rid o' de worms in de chillun. She'd give calomel in 'lasses when we needed cleanin' out.

"I's seen heep o' niggers sold. De white folks would put pieces o' quilts in de mens britches to make em look like big fine niggers an' bring lots of money.

"I seed one woman named Nancy durin' de war what could read an 'rite. When her master, Oliver Perry, found dis out he made her pull off naked, whipped her an den slapped hot irons to her all over. Believe me dat nigger didn't want to read an 'rite no more.

"Peeple dese days is in Hebben now to what we was in dem times.

"I's seen nigger women dat was fixin' to be confined do somethin' de white folks didn't like. Dey would dig a hole in de ground just big 'nuff fo' her stomach, make her lie face down an whip her on de back to keep from hurtin' de child. Lots o' times de women in dat condition would be plowin', hit a stump, de plow jump an' hurt de child to where dey would loose it an law me, such a whippin as dey would get!

"We went to preachin' at de white folks church. De preacher would preach to de white folks furst den he'd call de niggers in an preach to us. He wouldn't read de Bible he'd say: 'Obey yo' Missus an' yo Master.' One ole nigger didn't have no better sense dan to shout on it once.

"When niggers died you could hear someone goin' on de road singin': 'Hark From de Tomb de Mournful Sound.'

"I's seen de patrollers whip niggers an dey would allus put his head under de rail fence an whip him from de back. We used to sing a song like dis: 'Run nigger run de Patrollers will catch you 'tis almost day.'

"When de war was over Marsa come told us niggers we was free but said if we'd stay on with him de cotton money would be divided out between us niggers. Shore 'nuff Marsa sold dat cotton an 'fore he could divide it out his sister, Miss Bitha, stole it. Finally he got a little o' it an' give it to de niggers. Some o' em took it an aint been back since. We stayed on there three years. Finally Capt. Jack give his niggers land an dey just stayed on with him.

"My furst husband was Bob Pittman an our only child died. My next one was George Jean an our only child died. Den I married Hilliard Williams an we had 14 chillun an' raised em on Capt. Jacks place. Only four livin' now. Dey is day laborers, a preacher an a farmer. Me an my ole man lived together 50 years. He died in 1927. We was de founders of de colored Methodist church at Big Creek."

ELIGE DAVISON

Interviewed at Madisonville, Texas

Interviewer not identified

Age when interviewed: 86+

MY BIRTH WAS in Richmond. That's over in Old Virginny, and George Davidson owned me and my pappy and mammy. I 'member one sister named Felina Tucker.

Massa and Missus were very good white folks and was good to the black folks. They had a great big rock house with pretty trees all round it, but the plantation was small, not more'n a hundred acres. Massa growed tobacco on about thirty of them acres, and he had a big bunch of hogs. He waked us up about four in the mornin' to milk the cows and feed them hogs.

Our quarters was good, builded out of pine logs with a bed in one corner, no floors and windows. Us wore old lowell clothes and our shirt, it open all down the front. In winter Massa gave us woolen clothes to wear. Us didn't know what shoes was, though.

Massa, he look after us slaves when us sick, 'cause us worth too much money to let die just like you do a mule. He get doctor or nigger mammy. She make tea out of weeds, better'n quinine. She put string round our neck for chills and fever, with camphor on it. That sure keep off diseases.

Us work all day till just before dark. Sometimes us got whipping. We didn't mind so much. You know how stubborn a mule am, he have to be whipped. That the way slaves is.

When you gather a bunch of cattle to sell their calves, how the calves and cows will bawl, that the way the slaves was then. They didn't know nothin' 'bout their kinfolks. Most chillen didn't know who their pappy was and some their mammy, 'cause they taken away from the mammy when she wean them. They sell or trade the chillen to someone else, so they wouldn't get attached to their mammy or pappy.

Massa learn us to read and us read the Bible. He learn us to write too. They a big church on he plantation and us go to church and learn to tell the truth.

I seed some few run away to the North and Massa sometime catch 'em and put 'em in jail. Us couldn't go to nowhere without a pass. The patter-rollers would get us and they do plenty for nigger slaves. I'se went to my quarters and be so tired I just fall in the door, on the ground, and a patter-roller come by and hit me several licks with a cat-o-nine-tails, to see if I'se tired enough to not run away. Sometimes them patterrollers hit us just to hear us holler.

When a slave die, he just another dead nigger. Massa, he builded a wooden box and put the nigger in and carry him to the hole in the ground. Us march round the grave three times and that all.

I been marry once before freedom, with home weddin'. Massa, he bring some more women to see me. He wouldn't let me have just one woman. I have about fifteen and I don't know how many chillen. Some over a hundred, I'se sure.

I 'member plenty about the War, 'cause the Yankees they march on to Richmond. They kill everything what in the way. I heared them big guns and I'se scared. Everybody scared. I didn't see no fightin', 'cause I gets out the way and keeps out till it all over. But when they marches right on the town I'se tendin' horses for Massa. He have two hosses kilt right under him. Then the Yankees, they capture that town. Massa, he send me to get the buggy and hoss and carry Missus to the mountain, but them Yankees they capture me and say they gwine hang that nigger. But, glory be, Massa he saves me before they hangs me. He send he wife and my wife to another place then, 'cause they burn Massa's house and tear down all he fences.

When the War over Massa call me and tells me I'se free as he was, 'cause them Yankees win the War. He gives me five dollars and say he'll give me that much a month iffen I stays with him, but I starts to Texas. I heared I wouldn't have to work in Texas, 'cause everything growed on trees and the Texans wore animal hides for clothes. I didn't get no land or mule or cow. They warn't no plantations divided what I knowed about. Most niggers just got turn loose with a cuss, and not 'nough clothes to cover their bodies.

It about a year before I gets to Texas. I walks nearly all the way. Sometimes I get a li'l ride with farmer. Sometimes I work for folks along the way and get fifty cents and start again. I got to Texas and try to work for white folks and try to farm. I couldn't make anything at any work. I made five dollars a month for I don't know how many years after the War. Iffen the woods wasn't full of wild game us niggers all starve to death them days.

I been marry three time. First wife Eve Shelton. She run off with another man. Then I marries Fay Elly. Us separate in a year. Then I marry Parlee Breyle. No, I done forgot. Before that I married Sue Wilford, and us have seven gals and six boys. They all in New York but one. He stays here. Then I marries Parlee and us have two gals. Parlee die three year ago.

The gov'ment give me a pension and I gets li'l odd jobs round, to get by. But times been hard and I ain't had much to eat the last few years. But I gets by somehow. I done the best I could, 'sidering I'se turned out with nothin' when I'se growed and didn't know much, neither. The young folks, they knows more, 'cause they got the chance for schoolin'.

RECONSTRUCTION

The following readings describe what life was like for free blacks after the Civil War. The end of slavery did not bring about instant or full freedom to black people. Reconstruction brought occupation by Yankee troops and carpetbaggers. Neither did the end of the Civil War bring the promised "forty acres and a mule" to the landless free men and women. In order to live, the former slaves once again had to sell their labor to the landowner. As you are reading, watch carefully for the beginnings of a new relationship between the landlord and his workers called sharecropping.



In the next selections, Henry Adams, who was twenty-two at the end of the war, talks about the first months of liberty on a plantation in Louisiana.

Henry Adams Talks About . . .

LIBERTY?

The white men read a paper to all of us colored people telling us that we were free and could go where we pleased and work for who we pleased. The man I belonged to told me it was best to stay with him. He said, "The bad white men was mad with the Negroes because they were free and they would kill you all for fun." He said, stay where we are living and we could get protection from our old masters.

I told him I thought that every man, when he was free, could have his rights and protect themselves. He said, "The colored people could never protect themselves among the white people. So you had all better stay with the white people who raised you and make contracts with them to work by the year for one-fifth of all you make. And next year you can get one-third, and the next you maybe work for one-half you make. We have contracts for you all to sign, to work for one-twentieth you make from now until the crop is ended, and then next year you all can make another crop and get more of it."

I told him I would not sign anything. I said, "I might sign to be killed. I believe the white people is trying to fool us." But he said again, "Sign this contract so I can take it to the Yankees and have it recorded." All our colored people signed it but myself and a boy named Samuel Jefferson. All who lived on the place was about sixty, young and old.

On the day after all had signed the contracts, we went to cutting oats. I asked the boss, "Could we get any of the oats?" He said, "No; the oats were made before you were free." After that he told us to get timber to build a sugar-mill

to make molasses. We did so. On the 13th day of July 1805 we started to pull fodder. I asked the boss would he make a bargain to give us half of all the fodder we would pull. He said we may pull two or three stacks and then we could have all the other. I told him we wanted half, so if we only pulled two or three stacks we would get half of that. He said, "All right." We got that and part of the corn we made. We made five bales of cotton but we did not get a pound of that. We made two or three hundred gallons of molasses and only got what we could eat. We made about eight-hundred bushel of potatoes; we got a few to eat. We split rails three or four weeks and got not a cent for that.

In September I asked the boss to let me go to Shreveport. He said, "All right, when will you come back?" I told him "next week." He said, "You had better carry a pass." I said, "I will see whether I am free by going without a pass."

I met four white men about six miles south of Keachie, De Soto Parish. One of them asked me who I belonged to. I told him no one. So him and two others struck me with a stick and told me they were going to kill me and every other Negro who told them that they did not belong to anyone. One of them who knew me told the others, "Let Henry alone for he is a hard-working nigger and a good nigger." They left me and I then went on to Shreveport. I seen over twelve colored men and women, beat, shot and hung between there and Shreveport.

Sunday I went back home. The boss was not at home. I asked the madame where was the boss? She says, "Now, the boss; now, the boss! You should say 'master' and 'mistress'—and shall or leave. We will not have no nigger here on our place who cannot say 'mistress' and 'master.' You all are not free yet and will not be until Congress sits, and you shall call every white lady 'missus' and every white man 'master.'"

During the same week the madame taken a stick and beat one of the young colored girls, who was about fifteen years of age and who is my sister, and split her back. The boss came next day and take this same girl (my sister) and whipped her nearly to death, but in the contracts he was to hit no one any more. After the whipping a large number of young colored people taken a notion to leave. On the 18th of September I and eleven men and boys left that place and started for Shreveport. I had my horse along. My brother was riding him, and all of our things was packed on him. Out come about forty armed men (white) and shot at us and taken my horse. Said they were going to kill every nigger they found leaving their masters; and taking all of our clothes and bed-clothing and money. I had to work away to get a white man to get my horse.

Then I got a wagon and went to peddling, and had to get a pass, according to the laws of the parishes, to do so. In October I was searched for pistols and robbed of \$250 by a large crowd of white men and the law would do nothing about it. The same crowd of white men broke up five churches (colored). When any of us would leave the white people, they would take everything we had, all the money that we made on their places. They killed many hundreds of my race when they were running away to get freedom.

After they told us we were free—even then they would not let us live as man and wife together. And when we would run away to be free, the white people would not let us come on their places to see our mothers, wives, sisters, or fathers. We was made to leave or go back and live as slaves. To my own knowledge there was over two thousand colored people killed trying to get away after the white people told us we were free in 1865. This was between Shreveport and Logansport.



*"When the war over . . . most niggers just got turned
loose with a cuss, and not 'nough clothes to cover their body."*

- Elige Davison

LABOR CONTRACTS

In the first labor contracts, planters offered free men from one-fifth to as little as one-tenth of the crop. In addition, they often included regulations that were similar to the conditions under slavery. A typical contract approved by the Freedmen's Bureau is presented below.

The said Freedmen and Women agree to conduct themselves honestly and civilly, to perform diligently and faithfully, all such labor [ten hours a day] on said plantation as may be connected with the raising of the crop. The said Freedmen further agree not to invite visitors upon the premises or absent themselves during working hours.

For every day's labor lost by absence, refusal or neglect to perform the daily task, the laborer shall forfeit fifty cents. If absent without leave two dollars a day. If absent three days without leave to be liable to dismissal and forfeiture of wages.

Said freedmen agree to take care of all tools and implements; also to be kind and gentle to all work animals; also to pay for any injury done to either the animals or farming tools while in their hands and by reason of their carelessness or neglect.

It is expressly agreed by the Freedmen that Firearms shall not be used within the boundary of the plantation without permission and that violation of this agreement will subject them to dismissal and forfeiture of wages.

Cane Cook of Americus, Georgia, and Simon Dickson and Hiram Smith of Louisiana talk about the difficulties in obtaining a fair settlement from the landlord.

I worked for Robert Hodges last year. I had my own stock and rented land from him, agreeing to give him one-third of the corn and one-fourth of the cotton for rent. We divided the corn by the wagonload and had no trouble about that. I made three bales of cotton, weighing five hundred and six, five hundred and eleven and four hundred and seventy pounds. He told me he would buy my cotton and pay the market price which was twenty-one cents [a pound]. I got some meat and corn and other things from him during the year and he paid me \$50 in cash, Christmas.

I went to him last Friday for a settlement. When he read over his account he had a gallon of syrup charged to me. I told him I had not had any syrup. He asked me if I disputed his word. I told him I did not want to dispute his word but I have not had any syrup. He got very angry and took a large hickory stick and came toward me. He is a strong man and I did not want any trouble with him. I went backwards to the door and he followed me. As I turned to go down the steps he struck me a powerful blow on the back of my head and I fell to the ground.

I could not move hand or foot. Two colored men carried me [home]. My hands, arms, back and legs are almost useless. I have to be fed like a baby. I have not gone before any

of the courts. I have no money to pay a lawyer and I know it would do no good. Mr. Hodges has not paid me for my cotton. While I lay before his door he told me that if I died he would pay my wife \$50. I hope there will be some law sometime for us poor oppressed people. If we could only get land and have homes we could get along, but they won't sell us any land.



My name is Simon Dickson. I worked for Miss Lizzie Dickson on her place, in 1873. I made six bales of cotton and each bale weighed about six hundred pounds. I was to give her one hundred pounds to the acre but she took all I made that year for the money I owed her, \$20. In 1874 I made eight and a half bales of cotton, weighing on an average five hundred and twenty-five pounds to the bale. I was to give her one-half of what I made. But she again took all. I then owed her about \$40. She said I owed her \$115 so she taken all of my crop every year for what she claimed I owed her, yet she would never tell me what anything cost.

My name is Hiram Smith. I live on Joe Williams' place. I asked Mr. Williams to pay me what he owed me on my cotton; also \$75 he had taken from me. He jumped on me and beat me so badly I fear I cannot live. He made me crawl on my knees and call [him] my God, my master, the God of all power, all because I had asked for a settlement. That was done on the 16th of March, 1876.

During Reconstruction, Henry Adams, a former slave, traveled throughout Louisiana and neighboring states. He reported the following to a Senate investigating committee in Washington.

I have seen colored children barefooted, half naked and even starved on their way to school, and in [some] parishes there was no public schools. The colored people works for shares of the crop, one-third they makes and their employers find them something to eat and farming utensils, giving them rations for man and wife per month the following: two bushels of meal and twenty pounds of pork, nothing else.

The white people rob the colored people out of two-thirds of what they make. For instance, the contract [is] for one-third or one-quarter of the crop. They take every bale and will not divide it at the gins but ship it to the city. Then when the cotton is sold they figure and figure until there is but little left to the colored man.

White men would sell cotton for colored persons in Shreveport, and the bale of cotton bringing \$65, they would pay them \$49 and tell them that was money enough for a nigger to have. They would buy cotton from colored people when cotton was selling at twelve and a half cents and pay them six to seven cents. I was present and saw with mine own eyes.

I picked cotton of Forster plantation and I seen the white men that weighed the cotton. When the draught would weigh seventy-five pounds they would check fifty pounds. Yet they were charging colored people fifteen and twenty-one cents per pound for meat; ten pounds of flour for \$1; tobacco sixty cents per plug; sugar fifteen to twenty cents per pound and coffee in proportion.

I worked on James Hollingsworth's plantation and the same thing was practiced on that place. On Dr. Vance's plantation where I often worked, I have seen the same. From the mouth of Red River to Jefferson, Texas, no difference can be seen. Even in Arkansas and Texas where I traveled I see the same, as it was my business to look around and ascertain as far as possible into the treatment of colored people by whites.

In going from Shreveport to New Orleans I seen along the banks of Red River colored people who were afraid to talk to me at landings. I asked several of them, "Do you not live well?" They told me, "No, the whites take all we make and if we say anything about our rights they beat us." I told them, "If the men you all live with this year do not give you all what belongs to you just like he has promised, you all must leave that place and go to another, and if he does not fulfill his contract leave that place also." They told me, "If we do that we will have to be all the time going from plantation to plantation for all the white men are alike on this Red River. What one of them says to us, they all say, and what one of them do to us, they all do. We have been working hard since the surrender, and have not got anything."



Questions for Discussion

1. How do you think the new system of sharecropping on contract labor differed from slavery? What is the meaning of the word "freedom" when viewed in this context?
2. What recourse did the freed slaves have in helping determine their own status as wage earners? Who held the power in the relationship?
3. Do you believe that the situations described by Henry Adams are typical? Why? Why not?
4. What do you find in these stories that you feel is related to the turmoil of the civil rights movement of the 1960's?

Suggested Activity

Review the Student Activities Kit (SAK); particularly Competency Area C-Simulation. Then role play a situation where a former slave owner is arranging with his newly freed slaves to stay and work on the plantation. The owner offers one-fifth of what the workers can produce. Arrangements must be made for seed, fertilizer, tools, work animals, and food and clothing for the year.

Optional

Assign some students to research and report to the class on the Freedman's Bureau and the role of black elected officials during Reconstruction (see Supplementary Topics Notebook).

TENANCY

In the South, as in the rest of the country, the hard times brought on by the Depression caused considerable upheaval. In addition to a sharp decrease in the price of cotton, the Southern soil was beginning to wear out. Years of intensive cultivation had depleted its natural resources and farmers were forced to rely more and more heavily on chemical fertilizer.

When the Depression hit, the South was still largely rural. Industrialization was concentrated in the textile mills of the Carolinas and around a few other large urban centers like Birmingham, Alabama where the steel industry was developing. Most people in the region continued to live on the farms and make a living the best way they could. In 1927, King Cotton was selling for 20 cents a pound. The market for the South's major crop was beginning to dwindle and the results were devastating.

During the 1930's some nine million people were tenant farmers in the South. An additional two million made their living as farm wage hands.





Two-thirds of the nation's landless farmers were in the South, an area with only one-third of the nation's farmlands. By the late 1930's there were more than one million white tenant farmers in the South. The proportion of black farmers who were tenants was nearly 80% compared to 46% white farmers who were tenants.

Black and white together, these sharecroppers or tenant farmers were now concentrated on the lands where the plantations had been during slavery. The following excerpts examine the system of sharecropping as it had progressed from the post-reconstruction period to the time of the Great Depression.

III. SHARECROPPING AND TENANCY

SHARECROPPING

Katharine Lumpkin in her Depression era study of the South, called The South in Progress, referred to share-cropping as a blind alley and noted the various categories of landlord-tenant relationships.

The landlord-sharecropper relation overshadows all others in southern agriculture, even in the numbers involved. To be sure, there are cash tenants, some 200,000 of them. But they are in a different category entirely. A cash tenant owns his own tools and work animals, rents his farm and dwelling outright, supplies his own food and seed and fertilizer, supervises his own farm. Some cash tenants are very well-to-do, others are very poor; if times are bad they may lose many of their possessions and have to go to farming on shares; but so long as they are cash tenants their economic relation is different entirely from sharecropping. Similarly with owners on family-sized farms. Some of them may be fairly prosperous, even hiring occasional labour. Many own only a few acres - for example, 153,500 out of the one million-plus farm owners own 20 acres or less. Many go to make up that marginal farming class that has been shunted off onto the poorest lands by the plantation economy and are barely able to scratch a living from the soil. If they are mortgaged up to the hilt, as so many are, and economic depression comes along, numbers of them lose their land. They must move to the mill towns or go in for farming on shares. So long as they are owners, however, they feel themselves better off than sharecroppers, and in point of economic status they are.

Share tenants, on the other hand, are to be classed with sharecroppers, even though they are a little better off. The difference lies in their few possessions: they usually own a mule and perhaps a few farm tools, and on this account get a larger share in the contract. Theirs is customarily two-thirds of the crop, instead of the croppers' one-half. It is true that the share tenant feels he is materially better off because of his possessions. Consider what a difference it makes to him and his family to have their own mule, not only for work, but for trips to town upon occasion. In general he feels a bit more of a sense of well-being. But this feeling of added security does not get the share tenant far, for in all essential respects he bears the same economic relation to the landlord as does the cropper. In law and custom their status is usually recognized as the same.





As for the one million "unpaid family workers," they too belong for the most part in the sharecropper class. Some are at work on small owned farms, but estimates show that most of them are the wives and children of tenants working on chores, and of farm wage labourers. To include them completes the picture of the family labour system under which the South's cash crops are raised.

The second most numerous group in southern agriculture, next to those at work on shares, are farm wage labourers. There are more than a million in the South, comprising close to a third of the farm labour force. They are scattered all over the region. Many work on plantations side by side with sharecroppers, and thereby hangs a significant story. Their condition should be better than that of croppers—if they actually received regular cash wages, and had freedom of movement and the right to spend what they made as they saw best. Actually the farm labourer in the South is at the bottom of the scale. The cropper's contract provides for

year-round work and presumably for year-round "furnishing." But the wage labourer on the plantation, instead of getting cash wages in the usual sense of the term, generally gets his wages in terms of a cabin for his family, and credit for food at the plantation store. Working only seasonally, he gets paid only for the period when he works, which is by no means the whole year. Being assigned to no particular strip of land, as is the sharecropper, he is likely to get the worst cabins. He has to work just as long hours, gets no better food, his wife and children are under the same necessity to labour in the fields.

There are wage labourers of course in the southern states who work on a cash basis. They are paid by the day for what they do. In some sections, as in the Southwest, the status of some may even resemble that of the farm labourer to be found on northern farms. But in the sharecropping regions, farm labourers commonly are worse off than are croppers themselves. Perhaps only the disappearance of plantation methods could bring much change for them. It is significant to find that 48% of farm wage workers are colored, a number altogether disproportionate to the size of the colored population gainfully employed.

While it is true that the farm wage labourer commonly suffers the worst conditions, it is not a corollary that sharecropping is therefore a stage higher up. The sharecropper suffers legal and other bonds by reason of the strictures placed upon him when he accepts his so-called "contract" with the landlord.





Some people think of sharecropping (and share tenancy) as a stage lying in between wage-work, which stands at the bottom of the scale, and the independent control of a farm through cash tenancy or farm ownership, which is the next round up. In their minds sharecropping is a step toward farm ownership. Of course, there are instances of croppers who have become owners or cash tenants. But the rule is all the other way. In reality, sharecropping is not a step toward anything. A man may one year be a cropper and another be a wage labourer. Because in sharecropping he is a little better off, he sticks to that if he can. A good year may come for a cropper here and there, and he may be able to purchase a work animal—by down payment, likely as not, and the rest in dribblets—and hence get a larger share of the crop. But then if a bad year comes he may lose his work animal and he is back again as a sharecropper.

In the long run sharecropping becomes a blind alley, down which an ever larger body of southern farm people are being forced to go.

One of the overriding factors in the life of the sharecropper was constant debt. Landless and totally dependent for ones livelihood on the land owner, their lives revolved around the system of furnish. The furnish system meant that the landlord determined what food the cropper should eat and how much, the tools that he worked with, and even the amount of fertilizer he used. Katharine Lumpkin talks about this blind alley in the following excerpts.

The net effect of all this was to keep the sharecropper and his family completely dependent upon the landlord for everything. When the cotton was picked and ginned, and the corn harvested, the landlord usually got one-half of the crop, his share for permitting the cropper to work the land and live in the cabin and use the tools and work animals. The other half was supposed to be the cropper's, the cash from it his "earnings" for the year. But the landlord sold the cropper's cotton, and before he turned over to him the proceeds from the croppers' half, the landlord deducted from it an amount to cover all that had been advanced in food, fertilizer, seed, and so on, adding very heavy interest charges for everything loaned. If any were left after that, it was what the cropper received in cash.

After many years of the sharecropping system we have learned that little if anything is left. When the crop is in, the sharecropper may even discover that according to the landlord's accounting he is still in debt to him. This debt the landlord charges against his tenant's next year's account.

Since the sharecropper must depend for his very food upon the credit extended to him by the plantation store or the store designated by the planter, he has no choice but to pay the prices he is charged. Often he knows very little about these prices, except that they are high. The accounts are kept at the store, and when the crop comes in the cropper does not see his "share" of it until the amount of the advances to him have been deducted. Even if all planters and all merchants were honest and well-intentioned men—and we know that cannot be true—extreme exploitation would be inevitable under such a vicious credit system.



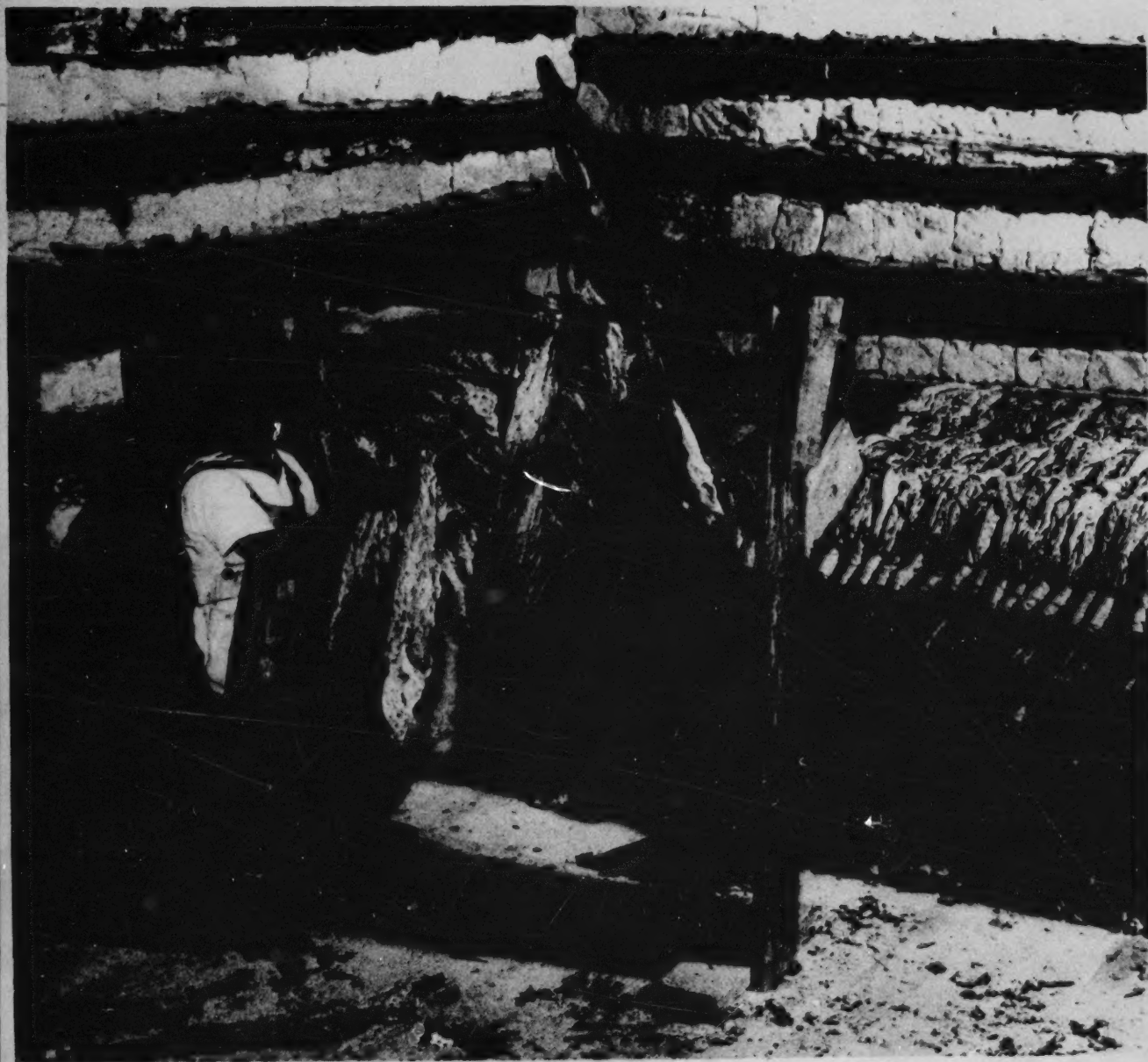
Sharecropping depended on the whole family working. Men, women, and children were all expected to work in the fields. Farm women were expected to do double duty—in the fields during the day, and housework in the morning and late evenings.

The cropper's boy has emerged into manhood at the age of 12. Side by side with his father he begins in February the spring's first chores. He ploughs when ploughing-time comes, he helps to plant and chop and lay-by in season, and then to pick and pick and pick, into the late fall.

At 12 years the cropper's child has had about all the schooling that will ever come to him. He went when he could to the country school a mile or two from home, during the four months it keeps open in the little two-room school house that houses all the grades. A rare trip to town several miles away, hanging around the plantation store with his father and other croppers once a week to receive the family supplies, going to services at the bare country church on Sundays; these make up his "cultural" life. Unless we add to that the old newspapers pasted on the walls to cover the cracks in the two-and-a-half room cabin his family calls home.

His younger brother and sisters, from six years up, are under the same necessity as he is to work, at whatever field tasks they are able to do. *The youngest cannot plough and chop, but they can pick, and this they must do as soon as*

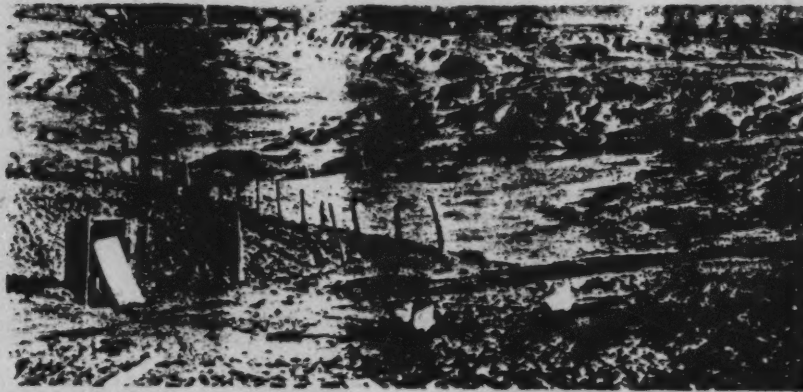




the bolls begin to burst in the landlord's fields. Today the cotton is ready; tomorrow rain might come. Out to the fields troop man, wife and children as soon as the sun rises, sacks slung across their shoulders. Even the six-year-olds have their sacks to fill and drag along behind them. A sack short enough to fit their small forms would hardly carry any cotton at all.

NATURAL DISASTER

Perhaps the worst thing the farmer has to deal with was natural disaster. Land erosion, lack of rain, and poor soil all combined to make farming a subsistence living at best.



One of the most devastating disasters to hit cotton country, however, was a small insect called the boll weevil.

THE BOLL WEEVIL

But the days of Georgia's all-cotton economy were numbered. During the three decades following 1920 the Georgia cotton crop was attacked by the boll weevil, by the economic depression of the thirties, by the New Deal agricultural programs and by World War II—all of which conspired to topple King Cotton from his throne in Georgia and make cotton growing merely one of several agricultural enterprises.

The boll weevil was the first of these attackers to strike. It appeared in Texas in 1894 and began moving eastward at the rate of 75 to 100 miles per year. The United States Department of Agriculture was soon making efforts to check its spread, but little was accomplished for several years. In 1904 Georgia was prematurely frightened by false rumors that the weevil had arrived in the state, and the legislature quickly authorized the State Board of Entomology to apply quarantine measures. Farmers' institutes and planters' meetings discussed the problem, and in 1906 the state entomologist went to Texas and Louisiana to study the weevil at first hand. By 1913, when the weevil actually arrived in southeast Georgia, a considerable educational campaign had been carried out.

During the years 1913-18, however, when the boll weevil was spreading over the whole state, the warnings of agricultural leaders produced little response among the bulk of farmers. The high price of cotton during World War I encouraged farmers to continue planting cotton at near normal levels despite all appeals to them to turn to something else. Boll weevil damage, moreover, remained rather slight for several years, causing only a 3 percent loss by 1916 and only a 10 percent loss by 1918. Apathy toward the impending disaster was encouraged by the announcement of the United States Department of Agriculture that effective weevil control measures (dusting with calcium arsenate) had been discovered.

Beginning with the crop of 1919, however, boll weevil damage became serious; and during 1921-23 it became disastrous when Georgia's yield fell 30 percent to 45 percent below normal each year. In some counties the yield dropped from around 200 pounds to 80 pounds per acre. The state's total crop dropped from an average of about 1,500,000 to 2,000,000 bales per year to a low in 1923 of less than 600,000 bales. Greene County, which in 1919 had produced more than 20,000 bales, produced only 333 bales in 1923. For the years 1920-1921 Georgia's cotton yield per acre averaged only 133 pounds, the lowest five-year average recorded since the 1870's and one of the lowest in the state's history.

With this turn of events, Georgia's general apathy toward the "winged demon" turned into panic. The State Department

of Entomology annually loaded "Peddler Cars" with calcium arsenate, sidetracked a car at virtually every important railroad station, and begged farmers to buy the poison. In 1923, 150 cars of poison were sold. Newspapers also broadcast control measures and bankers appealed to their debtors to accept the proffered advice.

Apparently, however, growing cotton under boll weevil conditions required more scientific management than most farmers were able or willing to give. In 1923 only 38 percent of the state's crop was poisoned. By then the production of Sea Island Cotton had been nearly wiped out; many upland cotton farmers were turning to peanuts, tobacco, and livestock; and thousands of landlords, tenants, and wage hands were deserting farming entirely, leaving the land to weeds and gullies. During 1920-25 Georgia's farm population declined by about 375,000 and nearly 3,500,000 acres of land were taken out of farming.

By 1924, fortunately, the worst was over and the cotton crop began recovering. Weevil damage was reduced considerably by droughts and by poisoning. But never again during the period of this study was it to attain its pre-boll weevil status. In 1926 the crop again covered 3,500,000 acres, but the days in which cotton was planted on four to five millions of Georgia's acres were gone. In 1930 a production of 1,500,000 bales was again achieved; but gone, too, were the days of 2,000,000-bale crops. Whereas in pre-boll weevil years cotton had accounted for about 66 percent of the value of all Georgia's crops, in 1929 it accounted for only 47 percent. Thus the boll weevil's effect was long-term, compelling farmers to produce cotton under scientific control measure which most of them mastered slowly or not at all; and many were forced to shift to other products or were driven entirely out of agriculture.

On the following pages, Nate Shaw gives a first person account of the devastation caused by the boll weevil. The interview, by Theodore Rosengarten, was published in the book All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw.

Nate Shaw talks about....

The Boll Weevil

1923, I got what the boll weevil let me have — six
 ya. Boll weevil et up the best part of my crop.
 Can't use no poison at that time, just pickin up
 squares. All you could do was keep them boll
 weevils from hatchin out and going back up on that
 cotton. Couldn't kill em.

The boll weevil come into this country in the
 teens, between 1910 and 1920. Didn't know about a
 boll weevil when I was a boy comin up. They blowed
 in here from the western countries. People was
 bothered with the boll weevil way out there in the
 state of Texas and other states out there before we
 was here. And when the boll weevil hit this country,
 people was fully ignorant of their ways and what to
 do for em. Many white employers, when they dis-
 covered them boll weevils here, they'd tell their
 hands out on their plantations — some of em didn't
 have plantations, had land rented in their posses-
 sion and put a farmin man out there; he was goin to
 gain that way by rentin land and puttin a man out
 there to work it; he goin to beat the nigger out of
 enough to more than pay the rent on it. And the
 white man didn't mind rentin land for a good farmer.
 That rent weren't enough to hurt him; he'd sub-rent
 it to the fellow that goin to work it or put him out
 there on halves. Didn't matter how a nigger workin a

if he worked it it's called his until it was picked
 out and ginned and then it was the white man's
 crop. Nigger delivered that cotton baled up to the
 white man — so they'd tell you, come out to the field
 to tell you or ask you when you'd go to the store,
 "How's your crop gettin along?" knowin the boll
 weevil's eatin away as he's talkin. Somebody totin
 news to him every day bout which of his farmers is
 pickin up the squares and which ones aint.

"You seen any squares fallin on the ground?"

Sometimes you'd say, "Yes sir, my crop's losin
 squares."

He'd tell you what it was. Well, maybe you done
 found out. He'd tell you, "Pick them squares up off
 the ground, keep em picked up; boll weevil's in them
 squares. If you don't, I can't furnish you, if you aint
 goin to keep them squares up off the ground."

Boss man worryin bout his farmers heavy in debt,
 if he ever goin to see that money. Mr. Lemuel
 Tucker, when I was livin down there on Sitimachas
 Creek, he come to me, "You better pick them
 squares up, Nate, or you won't be able to pay me this
 year."

Don't he know that I'm goin to fight the boll
 weevil? But fight him for my benefit. He goin to reap
 the reward of my labor too, but it aint for him that I'm

laborin. All the time it's for myself. Any man under
 God's sun that's got anything industrious about him,
 you don't have to make him work — he goin to work.
 But Tucker didn't trust me to that. If a white man had
 anything booked against you, well, you could just ex-
 pect him to ride up and hang around you to see that
 you worked, especially when the boll weevil come
 into this country. To a great extent, I was gived about
 as little trouble about such as that as any man. I
 didn't sit down and wait till the boss man seed my
 sorry acts in his field. I worked. I worked.

Me and my children picked up squares sometimes
 by the bucketsful. They'd go out to the field with little
 sacks or just anything to hold them squares and
 when they'd come in they'd have enough squares to
 fill up two baskets. I was industrious enough to do
 somethin about the boll weevil without bein driven
 to it. Picked up them squares and destroyed em,
 destroyed the weevil eggs. Sometimes, fool around
 there and see a old weevil himself.

I've gived my children many pennies and nickels
 for pickin up squares. But fact of the business, pickin
 up squares and burnin em — it weren't worth
 nothin. Boll weevil'd eat as much as he pleased.
 Consequently, they come to find out pickin up them
 squares weren't worth a dime. It was impossible to
 get all them squares and the ones you couldn't get
 was enough to ruin your crop. Say like today your
 cotton is illuminated with squares; come up a big
 rain maybe tonight, washin them squares out of the
 fields. Them boll weevils hatches in the woods, gets
 up and come right back in the field. You couldn't
 keep your fields clean — boll weevil schemin to eat
 your crop faster than you workin to get him out.

My daddy didn't know what a boll weevil was in
 his day. The boll weevil come in this country after I
 was grown and married and had three or four
 children. I was scared of him to an extent. I soon
 learnt he'd destroy a cotton crop. Yes, all God's
 dangers aint a white man. When the boll weevil
 starts in your cotton and go to depositin his eggs in
 them squares, that's when he'll kill you. Them eggs
 hatch out there in so many days, up come a young
 boll weevil. It don't take em but a short period of time
 to raise up enough out there in your field, in the spr-
 ing after your cotton gets up — in a few days, one
 weevil's got a court of young uns hatchin.



*We are tenants of the Almighty
Entrusted with a portion of His Earth
To Dress and Keep
And pass on to the next generations.*

*Louisiana Thomas
Farm tenant mother
Green County, Georgia*

EVERYDAY LIFE

The following selections are narratives about everyday life as a sharecropper. After reading them, write a short essay about what you think it was like to live as a sharecropper in the Depression South. Try to write it as a first person story, imagining yourself as a particular family member with particular responsibilities.



Arthur Raper was a sociologist who taught at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia. During the 30's and into the war years of the 40's, he studied and wrote about the problems of Southern croppers and tenants.

The following selection is taken from his book Sharecroppers All.

The South's landless farmers constitute a veritable kingdom—a kingdom of neglect and want, for here on the richest lands of the cotton country live the largest number of America's poorest and most dependent farm families. Wide fields of cotton and corn are punctuated by cabins with tiny bare yards. That the vast majority of the landless families have a very low plane of living is shown by their houses, their clothes, their food, their deficiency diseases, their use of midwives and patent medicines, the crude equipment they farm with, the low incomes they receive, and the high rates of interest they pay.

Plantation owners do not have tenant houses for whites and tenant houses for Negroes—they have tenant houses, little cabins of two or three rooms usually built of a single thickness of rough boards. In representative counties, one third have no window sash, one half no window panes, nearly two thirds have leaky roofs, less than one in ten have screens or paint, and only two in a hundred have a fly-proof privy, about half of these built recently by the WPA.



The patched overalls and faded gingham dresses of the tenant and wage-hand families are as characteristic of the cotton country as are the twisted, weather-beaten cabins.



The same families that pile up the world's surplus cotton crop are often in need of such basic cotton products as mattresses, sheets, shirts, and dresses. Many babies in the cotton country are reared with a scant half-dozen diapers, commonly made from feed and flour sacks. "Where is baby's Purina didy?" asks the weary, disheveled mother.

The tenant lives off fat back, corn bread, sorghum molasses, and "taters" in season. A can of sardines or salmon is a delicacy in many cotton cabins. The resulting



pellagra, rickets, low vitality, and unnecessary sickness mean "lazy" adults and "puny" children, and short graves.

Some planters arrange for a doctor to serve the tenant and wage-hand families on their plantations, but this is not general. Patent medicines command large sums from small incomes because they can be obtained on credit at the cross-roads store. At childbirth most mothers are attended by midwives, who are close by and cheap. The doctors live in town and charge extra for each mile. *Veterinarians are more available to the South's registered livestock than are physicians to the great mass of her landless folk.*

CRUDE TOOLS AND LOW INCOMES

The field tools used by the typical tenant farmer would not seem strange to Moses and Hammurabi. There is nothing very modern about one-horse gears, single-stock plows, long-handled hoes, double-blade axes, and a long sack to drag through the field at picking time. The tenant farmers of the South, with few exceptions, still live and move in a slow and simple world.



The plantation tenant women have none of the modern conveniences. They do the family wash over tubs, heat their flatirons before open fires, "tote" in the wood, carry water from well or spring, and bathe the children in wash pans. But they bear yet heavier burden—they work along with their men in the field during the rush seasons in spring and fall and bear more children than any group of women in America, except the women of Southern Appalachia and Ozarkia.



The cotton tenant's low plane of living is enforced by his small income, below sixty-five cents a day per family, on an average. Out of this amount he repays "the furnish," that is, the advance of food and clothing which landlord or merchant made to him while producing the crop. If he does not "pay out" in full when the crop is sold, the bill may be marked off—just dropped—or it may be applied to the indebtedness against his next year's crop.

In arranging "the furnish," the landlord or merchant takes a lien on the tenant's crop for the debt thus incurred. The usual carrying charge is a flat 10 percent. But most of the food and clothing are advanced to the tenant after March; the

debt is paid when the cotton is sold in September. "Ten per cent interest" on money for three and a half months is an interest rate of 35 percent per annum. The "Credit price," usually charged on goods consumed in the spring, commonly raises the total annual interest to 50 percent or more, and so the tenant family's two-hundred-dollar income is actually worth much less than that in cash.

THE LAME SERVICE OF CHURCH AND SCHOOL

The landless farm families with shabby houses, inadequate diet, and low incomes are the same families that the church and school serve most lamely.

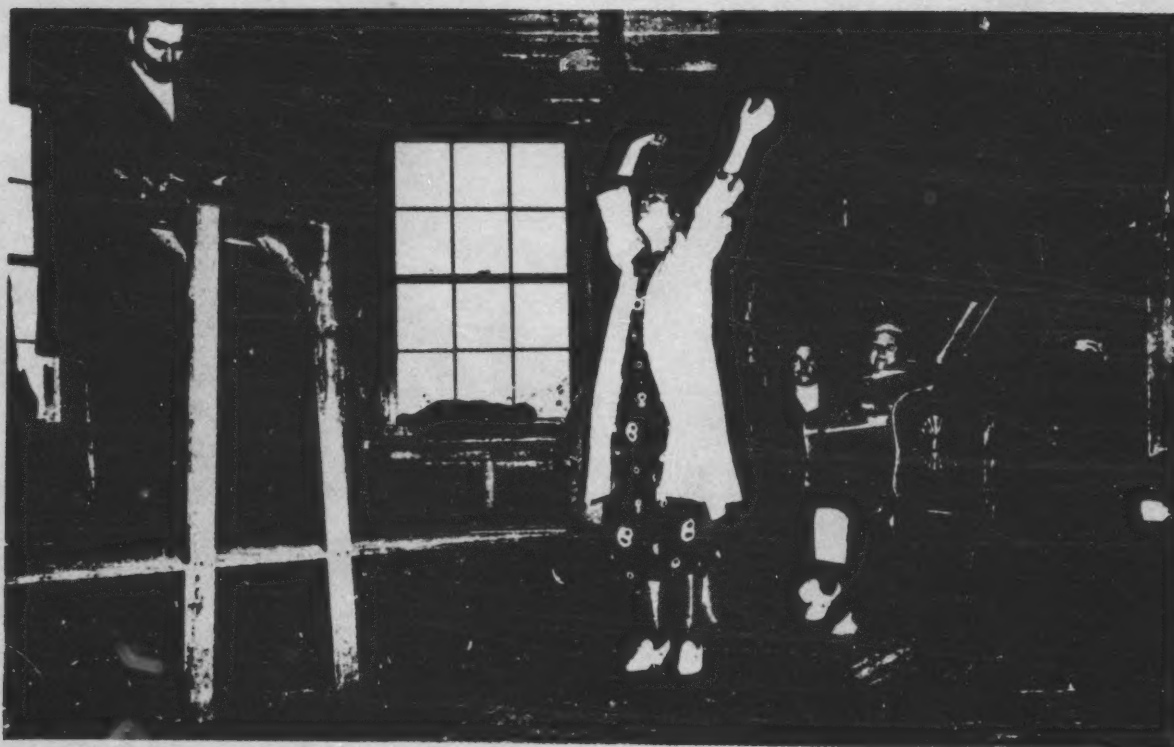
In rural churches one sees few people in overalls. Most churchgoers require at least three things to be comfortable: some "Sunday clothes," a little money for the collection plate, and the ability to entertain the preacher at a meal now and then. The typical farm tenant has only overalls and denim jacket, often patched. He has no money for the collection plate. It is doubtful whether even half of the tenant families in the South would have enough knives, forks, and plates to set a simple table for the family and one guest.



A larger proportion of Negro than of white tenants are church members. The Negro preacher is paid little, his vocabulary is of the fields, the songs are of the common people, the church is crude, and the furnishings plain. In plantation areas the rural white church, though small, is painted; the pews are usually varnished; the aisles are carpeted; the

man in the pulpit uses seminary language; the people read psalms from a book and sing to the accompaniment of reed organ or piano; the preacher always appears for the monthly preaching service in a clean white shirt, pressed trousers, and shined shoes.. In short, the rural Negro church reflects the status of the farm tenant, while the rural white church reflects the status of the landowner.

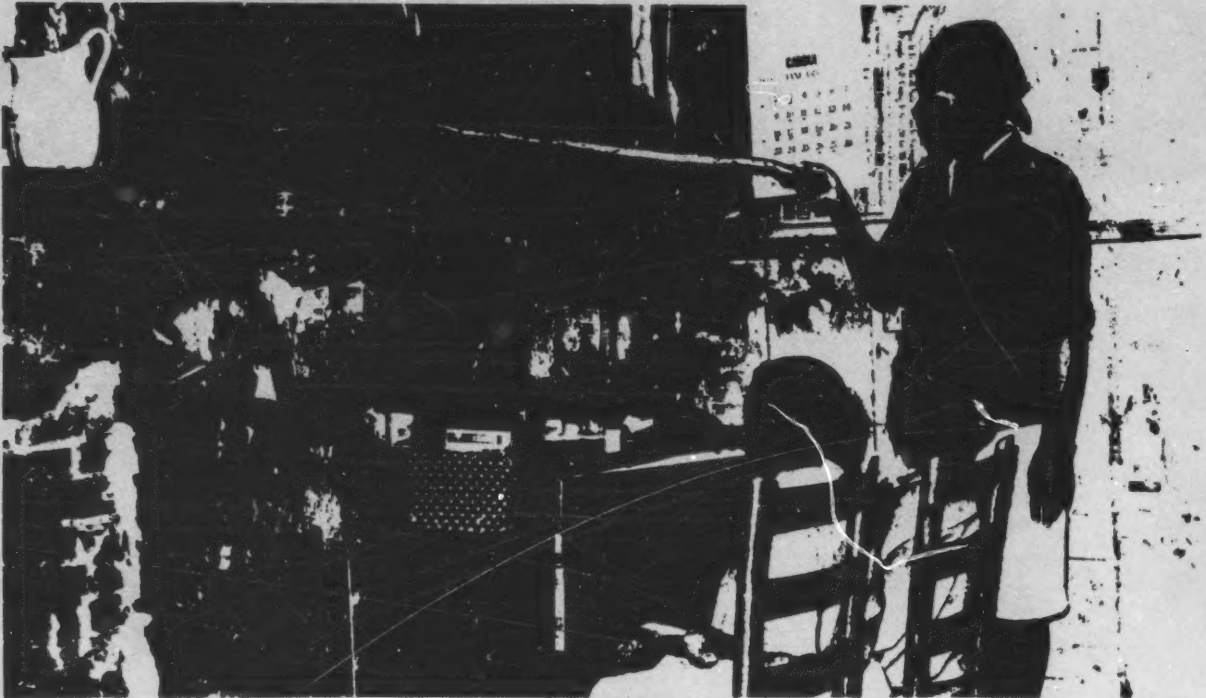
But not all white tenants are unchurched. The most independent and successful tenants, particularly cash renters in the newer parts of the South, frequently belong to the church and sometimes take an active part. There is emerging in widely scattered communities throughout the old South a number of highly emotional sects which are gaining a following among the white croppers and wage hands. Here, as elsewhere, religions of "escape" become popular as insecurity mounts.



In the field of public education the children of tenant families are handicapped in several ways. Scant clothing keeps many from school even in mild weather, while on rainy and cold days they are almost compelled to stay about home fires. The great majority bring for lunch cold baked "taters" and sandwiches of soda biscuits and fat back. Free textbooks,

recently instituted in Georgia and some other states, render a real service. But many parents cannot provide the pencils and paper. *While many white tenant children ride in busses to accredited schools, some white children and practically all rural Negro children trudge along dirt roads to one-teacher schoolhouses.*

Hundreds of the one-room Negro schoolhouses have no window sash or inside ceiling, no desks, sometimes not even a chair for the teacher. In scores of plantation counties practically all rural Negro schools convene in lodge halls and churches for want of publicly-owned schoolhouses. The



training of the rural teachers is inadequate and salaries are low, below thirty dollars per month in many counties. An occasional county spends as much money to transport one white child to and from an accredited school as it spends upon the total education of ten of its Negro children. The county superintendent may aggravate these handicaps by failing to supervise even the poor schools that are provided.

But not even all white children with school busses at their door go to school. Too often attendance turns upon the demands of the cotton fields and the whims of parents. Moreover, the typical tenant family, whether white or Negro, moves from one cabin to another every year or so, thus further interrupting school attendance.

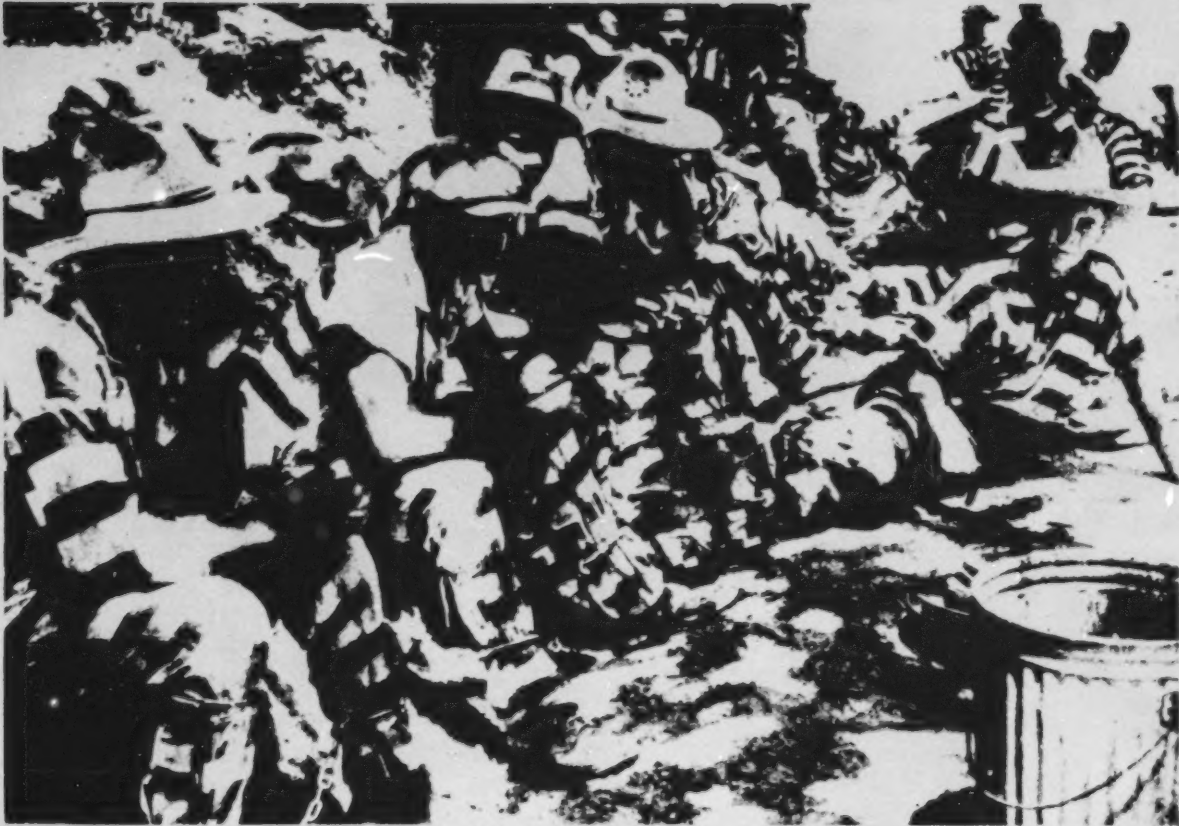
NO TRADITION OF PARTICIPATION

Generally speaking, farm tenants and wage hands do not participate in community affairs. They are the inarticulate benefactors or victims of the public policy and private practices of those who control the life of the community.

Few farm tenants and wage hands vote. Across the South the proportion of people who exercise the franchise is smallest in the cotton counties where farm tenancy is highest. The backbone of the "Solid South" lies in these counties where almost no Negroes vote and where less than half the whites—frequently less than one fourth—go to the polls even in the most hotly contested elections of the white primary.

The administration of justice and public service also reflect the dominance of the plantation owners and the defenseless role of the landless families. The relief agency may virtually quit giving relief during the cotton-picking season. The court officials, at the request of a landlord may postpone hearing the case of a "good tenant" from the spring to the fall term of court. The sheriff and his deputies may meet the convenience of the landlord by the wholesale arrest of Saturday night's "crap shooters" and "vagrants" and by their wholesale release on the promise that they will be in the cotton fields early Monday morning. In every phase of community life the landless farmers of the South are plagued by dependency. They have no tradition of participation.





The plantation community is essentially feudalistic. Any landless man who challenges the controls is dealt with firmly. If he defies the system by organizing wage hands for higher pay or farm tenants for written contracts, he is at once a target for withering ridicule and vitriolic denunciation; he may find himself without recourse to attorney and without civil rights; he may even be waylaid by hooded or unhooded leaders of the community, some of whom may be public officers.

If a landless farmer challenges the plantation system by disputing his debt or claiming the right to sell cotton where he pleases, he may find himself reminded of his dependency. If he is a white man and persists in "causing trouble," the night riders may pay him a visit, or the officers may drag him into court; if he is a Negro, a mob may hunt him down. Some suitable accusation can always be found; "insults" stem more from feelings than from actions—and there are white people, as disinherited as the hunted Negro, who find release from their own galling dependency in the mob license to carry weapons, scour woods and fields for human prey, conduct mock trials, and inflict punishment. In "frontier" plantation areas, the planters themselves may lead the mob.

If tenants in the best plantation sections seriously try to accumulate savings with which to buy land, they may find themselves without farms for another year, for planters frequently unite to show a "smart tenant" that he must stay "in his place."

Held in their disinherited status by economic and cultural forces, it is not surprising that many tenants are improvident, that they often fail to report for work when expected, that they are relatively unproductive, that they frequently make careless use of what little money and provisions they get. Nor is it surprising that a plantation system which rests upon labor so lacking in motivation should mine the soil of its fertility and be subjected to frequent bankruptcies, and that those who control it should be saddled with the unending tedium of supervising propertyless families made and kept childlike.

Two thirds of the nation's landless farmers are in the South, an area with but one third of the nation's farm lands and less than half of its farm population. The South's farm tenants, nearly two thirds of them white, are concentrated on the rich black lands of the regions where slave plantations were largest and where Negro freedmen subsequently worked as landless farmers until they began to be displaced by unemployed whites who preferred tenant cabins to unemployment. In the meantime the plantations themselves have been under pressure—some have been abandoned, many more have been held together by federal credit and subsidy.

EVERYDAY LIFE

WHY BOTHER?

ON A KNOLL in the old plantation section of Georgia is a column-fronted house, built more than a hundred years ago. The column at the east end of the porch leans. The upper half of the west chimney is down. An elderly couple, sharecroppers, lives in two of the rooms. The other five are empty, except for fertilizer sacks, mildewed cotton, unshelled peas, a discarded mule collar, and rubbish. Of the outbuildings, only the brick smokehouse is left. Three magnolias are still standing. The driveway is a gully.



AN OLD HOMESTEAD

In the early days the big barn housed twenty mules, and close by were four cows and a score of porkers. Today there is no cow or hog, and a single mule stomps flies in a temporary pole shed built off to one side so the old barn site could be planted to cotton.

Eggs were once carried to the kitchen cellar in a peck basket. Now a half-dozen long-legged chickens flutter from one patch of weeds to another to escape the hawks and back into the open again to get away from the weasels and rats. Squab and duck were common dishes then, while geese and guineas were kept for rare occasions and for barnyard decoration.



It was the boast of Colonel Smith, as of many another planter in this section, that his plantation averaged a hundred bales of cotton a year and made its own bread and meat besides. Last year's two bales were harvested from the best eight upland acres on the whole plantation.

The old corncrib tumbled down in early winter. The hand-hewn oak logs are almost gone; they burn better than green pine and are less trouble to get. The crib has served as an emergency wood pile for years and did not fall over until most of the fireplace-length logs between the front window and the corner had been pulled out. The weeds stand thick and tall there now, the one remaining spot on the plantation where cotton will grow as well next year as it would a hundred years ago.



On the distant slopes are pines—loblolly and short-leaf. They are called "old field pines," for they grow amid the sedge of abandoned fields. Down in the dark green pines is a network of gullies, some red and growing while others are matted over with thin brown blankets of pine needles. Many a low mound of rock and mortar amid taller pines and thicker brambles marks the former site of a tenant house, and now and then an old-fashioned rose locates a stable tenant family who had boasted a garden and flowers.

Despite the recent visits of junk men with small coins in their pockets, a piece of rusty log chain, the axle of a wagon, or a plow stock may still be had from deep in the pines. The remaining half-hidden treasures, however, are usually found off the familiar trails. Thus it is that a rabbit or coon hunt may end with little or no meat, but with a few pounds of scrap iron which mean a nickel or dime or quarter for chewing tobacco or snuff or fat back.

Once in a great while a discarded earthen jug is found. These water jugs have a timeless quality. Everything else about the old plantation has changed—everything except its place on the map and the plantation bell, which Kate Johnson, the sharecropper's wife, usually rings at twelve o'clock, sun time.



Half an hour later, Seab Johnson comes up back of the house from the Oconee River bottoms, thick and black except where shaded, where he has patches of corn. Hump-shouldered, he rides a bony mule that walks over to the chassis of an old automobile. Seab always alights there, for his back is tired and his legs are stiff. The mule goes to the trough by the well; Seab hobbles across to the shed and shucks a half-dozen ears of corn.

Seab and his wife eat their dinner on a table that leans against the wall. He is pleased to see a dish of poke greens. He is not surprised, for Kate forages about for dishes in season. Corn bread, fat back, and molasses get tiresome. Sometimes she slips off to the river and brings back catfish. When he takes a second helping, she thinks of the things he has brought her, usually at settlement time. The pots and pans and clothes were always welcomed; she and the family needed them but often did without. Most prized was a gold-framed picture of a mother and child. It was not a necessity. Sharecroppers do not live by bread alone.

Seab Johnson leaves the table, sprawls on old blankets by the kitchen door. With flies everywhere and screens nowhere, he moves from one place to another until plowing in the sun seems a relief. He takes the mule to the old chassis, climbs on, and goes back to the bottoms.

But he does not go down the same road that old Colonel Smith went down, for it became so deeply rutted a new road had to be laid out; and that one washed so badly that it, too, was abandoned years ago. As Seab Johnson goes down the ridge between these gullied roads, he remembers something of the colonel's last days—remembers many stories about him.

COLONEL SMITH'S GULLIES

Queer in some ways was Colonel Smith. He cut out a swath of trees one hundred feet wide between his house and that of Bill Jones, who had risen from the ranks to become one of the largest planters in the county. The colonel liked Bill Jones, kept him from losing his plantation to creditors one bad year by lending him more than twenty thousand dollars. The money was repaid, but the colonel would accept no interest. Seab recalls, too, the story of the small farm owner across the river who was burned out one night. When the colonel heard of it, he

sent messengers for Bill Jones and his other landed neighbors. He told them of the fire. One after another said, "I am sorry." "Well," said the colonel, "how sorry are you?" Under the colonel's leadership they were "sorry enough" to put the house and barn back—in less than a week. Active in politics, he held many county and state offices; active in religion, he attended church conferences and helped with counsel and money to establish a denominational college.



The colonel was interested in his community, was a student of everyday affairs. He was fearful lest there should be no good land left in a few generations; talked with his neighbors about what he saw; pointed out that the land was rich when first cleared of hardwood, but was unpro-

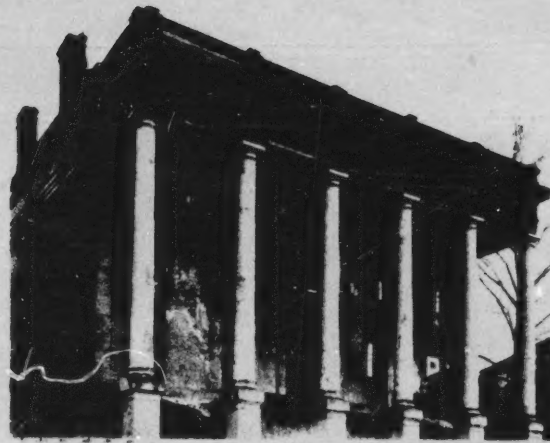
ductive after less than twenty years of intensive cultivation; that planters found it more profitable to open up new ground than to continue the cultivation of the old land. As he grew older he became more and more excited about the future of his community. He saw the first road to the river bottoms abandoned; he knew the same thing would happen to the second, and in a shorter time. There could be no real certainty of what would come of one's children if the soil continued to leach and wash. He was confident that the prosperous plantation families in this section were gradually being reduced to poor-white status. Few of the neighbors shared his insight or concern. But he kept agitating the matter with the assurance that somewhere there must be people who could see the need of new agricultural methods, until at length, while in a state office, the colonel found himself amid a group of men who formed the Southern Central Agricultural Society from which grew the Georgia State Department of Agriculture, said to be the first in America.

Riding along between the gullied roads, Seab knew how correct the colonel had been. The things the colonel had feared for his community in 1850 were facts before 1900. His overseer bought the place and planted every rich patch he could find in cotton. He tore down the garden fence and plowed up the azaleas back of the house. He even pulled up the boxwood and cut down the mimosa trees and all but three of the magnolias in front of the house. In a five year's losing fight with bankruptcy, he sold all the sawable timber on the place and got everything he could from land, man, and mule.

The Bill Jones house, empty for years, burned down

nearly a decade ago. Now only one Jones descendant remains in the county—and he a clothes presser in the county seat.

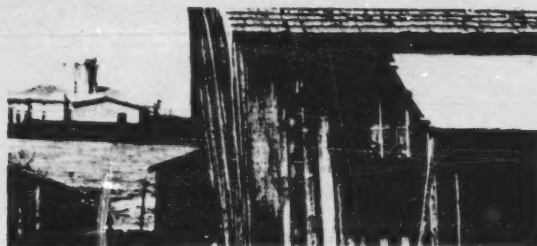
Nearly all of the old landed families have gone; red gullies shine under the sun where prized green fields once were; the big houses are crumbling; the tenant cabins have been swallowed up by the pines. With few exceptions, the



scattered families still on the land are renters and spend as much time getting berries and rabbits for their tables as in growing cotton to sell. Such are Seab's thoughts as he reaches the patchy bottom, now choked with willows and sand and red mud. Corn rows were a half-mile long here when he was a boy.

Back and forth on each row go man and mule. Hot and still, no air stirring or maybe the thickets surrounding the patch keep it out. By mid-afternoon Seab is glad to hear distant thunder. It suggests a change, at any rate. He can see the cloud from the middle of the clearing. There may not be rain; the wind will cool things off anyway. Eager for development, Seab scarcely dares look at the cloud lest it rain out and go round. The cloud gets darker; the thunder gets louder; Seab feels strangely creative—like he always does when the elements are on the march. Four more short rows are done.

He unhitches the mule, mounts from a fallen tree. Up the ridge between the gullies he rides. Before he is half-way home he doubts if there will be any rain, feels like he may have kept it from raining by leaving the plowing too early. Still headed homeward, he is wondering whether he should return to his work. Just then he thinks he hears the bell. He stops. He rather hopes it is the bell—it would settle his question about returning to the bottoms—but he is always afraid of what a bell between meals may mean. No question, it is the bell. Feeling akin to the self he is when the wind blows hard and the lightning flashes, he urges the mule on.



THE ABSENTEE OWNER'S VISIT

Prepared for almost anything, Seab reaches the yard, sees his wife leisurely drop the bell cord. A new automobile stands near the well. Aged and stooped again, Seab realizes that the absentee owner of Colonel Smith's old place has come for his spring visit.

Seab explains that the corn is already knee-high, that the cotton is ready to chop, and he and his wife will be in it before noon tomorrow. The absentee owner pays little attention to these reports. He has his eyes fixed on the end column of the porch. Why can't a man who lives in a house rent-free—has a whole place for one bale—keep rocks piled under the drip to protect the foundation? It would take only a little while; the mule is not busy for weeks at a time; there are rocks at the foot of the hill. Something is said, too, about the panes dropping from upstairs windows, and about the loose weatherboards on the southwest

corner of the kitchen. Just a matter of a few tacks in the sash and a few nails in the boards. The garden fence is down at places. Surely a tenant can keep the fence



stretched up around his own garden. Does the landowner have to get the posts and put them up after having furnished the wire? The table in the kitchen—why not fix the legs and put it in the middle of the floor? Something is said about the road up to the house—hardly fit for an owner to get over. Oh well, maybe it makes little difference for it looks like the house is going to fall down anyway. Seab and his wife walk along, hear the suggestions, realize the veiled threat, say nothing beyond an occasional affirmative grunt.

The polished automobile of the owner stands just beyond the chassis where Seab mounts his mule. Here they are—a live automobile and a dead one—side by side. One stays here; the other stands here in full daylight half an hour every six months or so. The shiny door clicks, the engine hums, the tires roll cautiously down to the big road, and the car is soon lost in a cloud of dust.



Seab returns to the corn patches in the river bottoms. He watches the loose earth spill around each stalk until the last row is done. It is dark when he drags his plow into the yard—the same sort of plow he used when a boy, the same sort his father used when he was a boy. Tomorrow he will work with a hoe—the same sort of hoe he used when a boy, the same his father used when a boy. This fall Seab and his wife will pick cotton in the same way his father and mother picked it. Thinking so, he throws a second armful of hay to the mule—a good animal for an old man, not fast and not fussy. But he does not live in the same kind of a house he did when a boy. He lives in Colonel Smith's big house—that is, in the kitchen and one adjoining room.

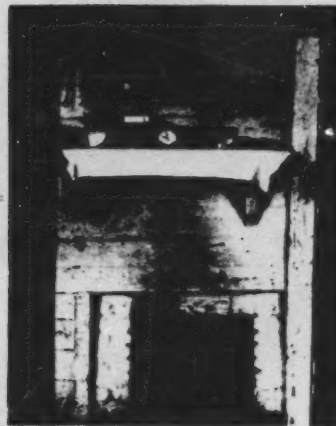
On his way to the kitchen, Seab walks by the old automobile chassis. There it is just as it was in mid-afternoon. But where is that new automobile that stood beside it? Is it not back on paved streets? And will it not stay there for the next six months, except when it goes over paved roads to other paved streets?

He sits down on the top kitchen step, looks out toward the tall weeds. This winter's cold days will consume the rest of the crib logs; a fire next spring will dispose of the tangled weeds and rubbish; then a plow deep in mellow earth with no oak or hickory roots; next fall real cotton! Or should the patch be put to roasting ears and wonder beans for Kate? Before the question is hardly raised, he thinks of the leaning column, the loose boards and panes, the garden fence, the road. Here he is thinking about these things again. They stay in his world. But that man who came out talking about them for half an hour today left before dark—left them here with Seab and the night. But no use to worry about things. Not going to. Why, he bought this old place just to make some money out of it—thought the price would go up—got pinched. But he has a city job, begins at nine and stops at five. Like the other people who buy cotton and sell hoes, he seems to think he makes the money he gets.

But Seab's real question remains unanswered. Where will he and Kate live next year? He sits there on the steps staring at the ground. His wife piddles about with her few pots and pans. He knows they would have trouble finding another place. He knows they cannot remain here except as sharecroppers, for they cannot buy a mule. They will have to have a little money advanced for next year's crop, as it had been for this. He knows the land does not belong to him. And he knows that the house is rotting down faster than he could restore it even if he tried.



Through his mind run the stories of the old colonel's unsuccessful efforts to keep the place from washing away; of Bill Jones's boast of upland cotton and lowland corn and fattening hogs. Absently he gazes into the deep darkness of the pines. Why should this absentee owner's visit leave him heavy when men like Colonel Smith and Bill Jones had failed to keep things up? He hears the fat back sizzle. It smells good. He rises to his feet, straightens his back, squares his shoulders, and sheds his load with, "Aw, why bother?" Once more Seab meets the conditions of survival—only a good digestion can overcome a steady diet of fat back and corn bread.



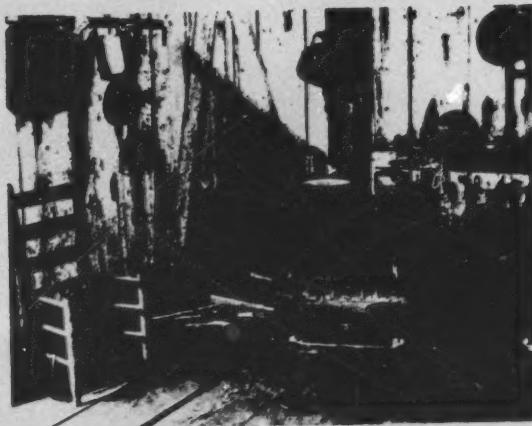
A GOLD-FRAMED PICTURE

The evening meal is eaten in silence; the lamp is carried into the other room, where the gold-framed picture hangs on the wall above the bed. It has always hung over their bed. First, in a tenant cabin on the Jones plantation. It would still be hanging there except that the loan company which now owns the land will make no advances of food and clothing to a tenant, to say nothing of providing a mule and half of the fertilizer. It next hung in a house formerly used by the overseer on a neighboring plantation; it perhaps would be there now except for the belief of the Atlanta owners that they could graze cattle and gain back some of the money lost growing cotton.

Now for ten years it has been on the same nail in Colonel Smith's old house; but it may not hang there much longer, for the absentee owner is tired of losing money on the old place. Moreover, death visits old sharecroppers, and the best of old houses fall down when neglected.

The baby in the picture, with blue eyes and golden hair, causes Kate Johnson's mind to wander widely—she thinks of a Delta plantation in Mississippi, an address in Pittsburgh, a fireman on the Illinois Central, a practical nurse in Jacksonville, a taxi driver in Washington, a barber in Augusta, a textile worker in Greenville, and a bellhop in Atlanta. She would not have thought of either Jacksonville or Augusta except that she and Seab took her younger sister's two small children when she died a-borning the third one. She would have thought of a sharecropper cabin down the road three miles, except that her daughter comes by every few days. She would have thought, too, of two short mounds and one long one in the thicket back of the abandoned church on the Jones plantation, and of a soldier's grave in France, except that for so long they have been dead. Like Seab, she has learned to stay alive by shedding the dead part of her load.

The flies hum against the ceiling until the lamp is blown out—good idea, the light attracts mosquitoes and oil costs money. There they sit in the cheap darkness with the leaning column and the loose boards and panes. Beyond are the silent pines and a network of red gullies stretching across hundreds of counties from Virginia to Texas.



In the darkness they wonder what they will do if they cannot stay here next year. Going to Pittsburgh is out of the question; rents are high and jobs are uncertain even for a young man like their son, who has been there and in Youngstown since the boll weevil came. Besides, he has a family and has twice been on relief—a bad tumble for him, who in 1928 drove back with his wife and first baby in his own automobile. He hopes things will get better but is afraid there is little hope of more than occasional work. No use to think of their boy in Greenville. His house is small, his family large, his work uncertain—and there is some sort of company rule against taking in old folks that can't work.

Joining their daughter in Jacksonville is impossible. She now works as a domestic, on the job every day from seven in the morning until six-thirty at night—not even off Sundays except from mid-afternoon on, and then sometimes called back for Sunday-evening parties. If times get better she can again find work as a practical nurse. But the choice just now is domestic service or relief. Their youngest boy, in Atlanta, became a bellhop only when it was that or be sent back home by the transient bureau. He may get a break—a better job in Atlanta or a certification to a CCC camp. As Seab understands it, this would be a godsend, for the boy would be better off at a camp than in the city; and twenty dollars a month is more money than he and Kate have seen in years.

The next-to-the-youngest boy is in Washington operating a taxi. He is hard pressed, in spite of taking in seven or eight dollars almost every day, for he pays a daily rent of \$4.65 for a last year's car, and the gasoline costs nearly two dollars more. Some days he fails to take in enough to meet his expenses; except for an occasional ten-dollar day, he would have to stop entirely. Chances of help from their nephew in Augusta are similarly poor, for a barber also has certain fixed expenses to meet before he has anything for himself and family. Seab and Kate know what it means to make something and owe all of it. Now they know that sharecroppers are not limited to the plantation system; they realize that their children who left home to escape the plantation system have come upon overseers and commissaries in the cities.

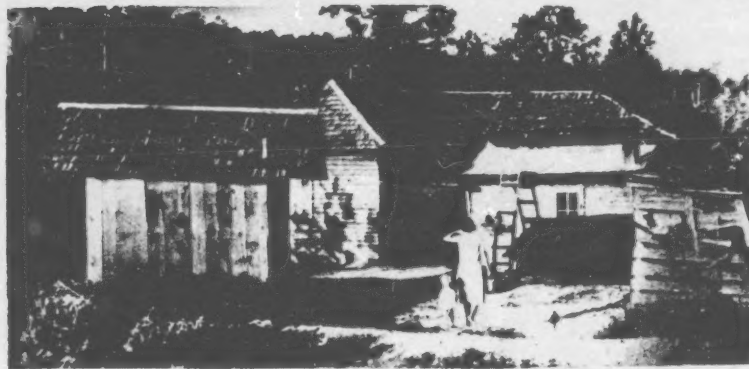
They hardly understand their son who fires on the Illinois Central. For fifteen years he has worked at a good paying job, has a family, owns a home in Memphis. His wife's people operate a drugstore there. Judging by the only pictures they ever got, his children are city folks sure enough. He has never visited his brother's family in the Delta, though his run takes him within seven miles of them every other day. His brother has not yet been to Memphis, is uncertain whether he would go by his house if he did get to Memphis. Once in a great while they see each other for a minute at the Clarksdale station.

Trying to understand it all, Kate comments on the letters from Clarksdale; how the children wanted to see their fireman uncle. They did see him—train overalls, tight cap, big black gloves—but he was busy or something. Not like their other uncles. The children still play train, but no one plays fireman. Kate fears she knows why her son in Memphis has not been home lately. Is he not ashamed of his own folks? Does he not live in a different world, and does it not take all of his money to stay in it? Now she begins to sense what he was talking about years ago when he said his brother in the Delta was "caught," that all of his brothers and sisters were "caught," and that the money he made—even if he gave all of it to them—would not get them loose. Kate and Seab talk on; they wonder if he, too, is not "caught"—maybe by something even more hard and cruel than that which holds the rest of the family.

STURDY SMOKEHOUSES

But Seab's thoughts do not linger with his grandchildren near Clarksdale or Memphis. He thinks about that Delta land; how rich it must be to grow nearly a bale of cotton without fertilizer; how level to have rows a mile long, a ditch, and then other rows a mile long. He can understand why they use lots of tractors there and why the cotton control program would reduce the number of workers needed even if no new tractors were bought. But he cannot quite see how people there should be as poor as they are in his county, where the land has washed away.

He mulls on this riddle a long time, until at length he recalls his son's suggestion that he need not feel badly about having to cultivate poor land, that he would be no better off if it were good. He then realizes that the Smith plantation, though it supported more families when it was fertile, provided them with no better food and clothes than he and Kate now have. But that was during slave times, and those were black folks.



Slowly it dawns upon Seab that he is a victim of slavery, too, and that there is still an element of something not unakin to slavery in the rich Delta plantations. At any rate, the reports that come from that section do not make him want to go there. He prefers to stay here where he understands things. Here where Colonel Smith and his neighbors saw what was happening but did not see what was causing it. Here where it has been more important to control the landless masses than to conserve the land they worked. Here where thick-walled smokehouses—built secure to keep slaves out—outlast all other plantation dwellings, including the owner's house. Pity, thought Seab, that the Colonel didn't understand old "Black Jake" when he said: "The way to stop gullies is to fill sharecroppers' stomachs full of food and their souls full of hope!"

Seab ponders his section—exhausted soil, abandoned houses, fewer jobs. He ponders the distant Delta—fertile lands, big debts, fewer jobs. He ponders the rich city—big business, high costs, fewer jobs.

He looks out the front door, past the leaning column, at pines that now stand silent and dark between Colonel Smith's old house and the distant knoll where Bill Jones once lived. It is bedtime. Kate Johnson strikes a match. The gold frame around the picture takes notice of the dim lamp. She and Seab know they are old and alone. Their nearest neighbor is not within calling distance; their daughter down the road has no way of hearing from them except by occasional passers-by, or when she walks; she will come less often—three children, and another baby expected soon.

They cannot chart their course. They know they face contrary winds. They are the last sharecroppers in the section, and one of these days the old Colonel Smith place will be abandoned or rented to some family with a mule. Despite these things, they hope to remain in this house, for if one gets sick, the other can ring the bell until help comes. Seab and Kate Johnson wait. Getting old-age assistance of nine to twelve dollars a month would be all right, if they had a house to live in. Their line has gone out to the ends of the earth—to a plain white cross in Flanders Field; to the city, with its wealth and destitution; to the rich black land, where plantations are propped up by government subsidy; to poor land, where people can live cheaply if not well. For them everything has changed—everything except their place on the map and the tone of the old bell.



Questions for Discussion

1. What is the "black belt?" What is its geographic relationship to the old plantation South?
2. What is sharecropping? What is tenancy? Discuss the various types of tenancy outlined in the readings. Which do you think is the best? the worst? Why do you think the status of the day laborer is below the share tenant?
3. Do you know any sharecroppers today? Do you know if there have been sharecroppers or tenants in your family? Have you ever heard it discussed at home?
4. What do you think Mrs. Lumpkin means when she refers to sharecropping as a blind alley?

Classroom Activity

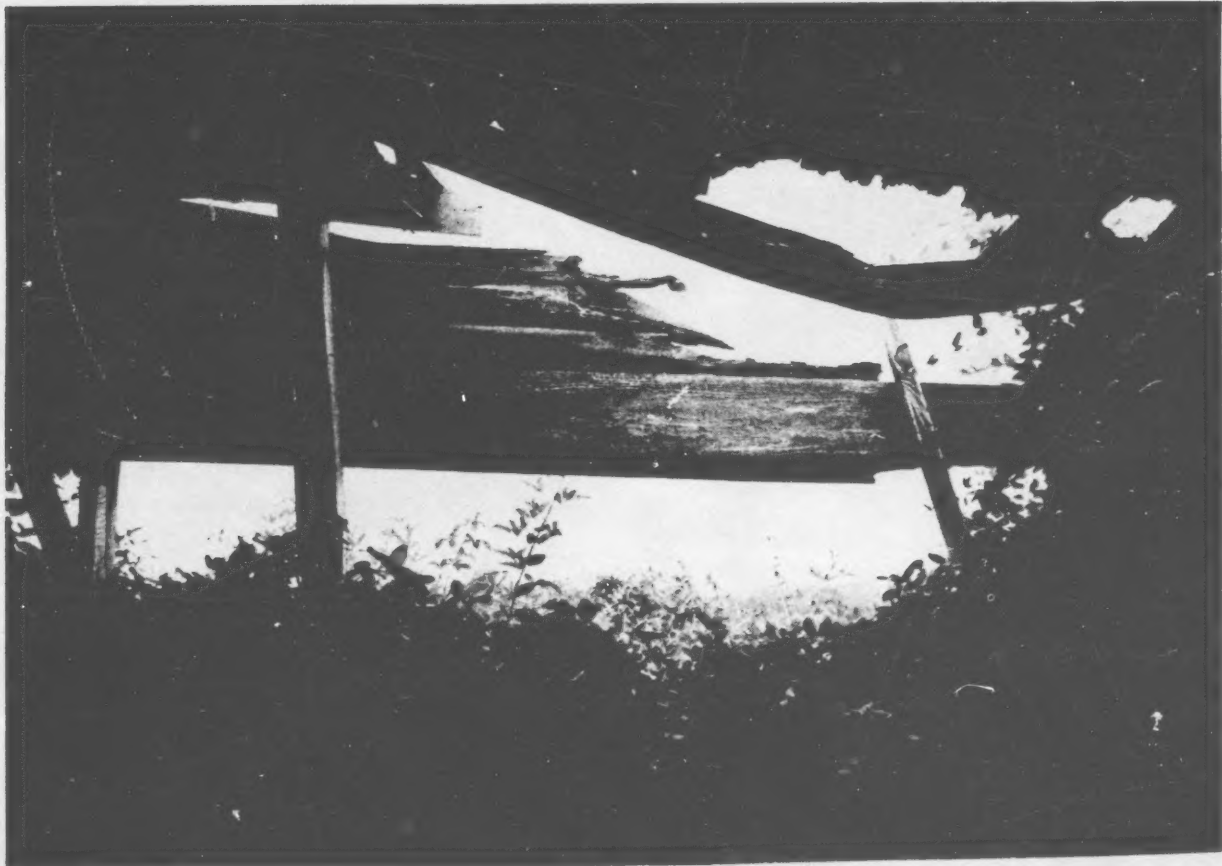
1. From this selection by Arthur Raper, have a general classroom discussion on the importance of owning land.
2. Divide the class into three groups and role-play the following situations:
 - a. A work-day in the fields in the life of a tenant family. Pay attention to who does what kind of work, how people might dress, and what they eat.
 - b. Tenant children in school.
 - c. Father of family "setting up" with landlord.

(This activity fulfills Competency C-2 or C-3 from the SAK.)

WE WAS ALL POOR THEN

The Sub Economy of a Farming Community
1900 1925

Land in Independence County, Arkansas, was attractive to the perennially displaced poor of the rural South. It was cheap land and its location not too far west of the Mississippi offered the natural advantages of river transportation. Poor whites pioneered this north central part of Arkansas from the early 1820's until the early years of this century. During the Civil War, settlement increased considerably as people entrapped by the fierce fighting to the east and south sought refuge in the wilderness of the Arkansas backlands.





MOVING

If the cropper was lucky at the end of the year and came out even with the landlord—or perhaps even with a little extra—he would often decide to move on to a new location . . . to new land . . . a new house . . . a new beginning . . . and the faint hope that perhaps this time it would be better.

Tore Up and a-Movin'

These Are Our Lives, a collection of writings from the Federal Writers Project of the 1930's personalizes the hardships of that era.

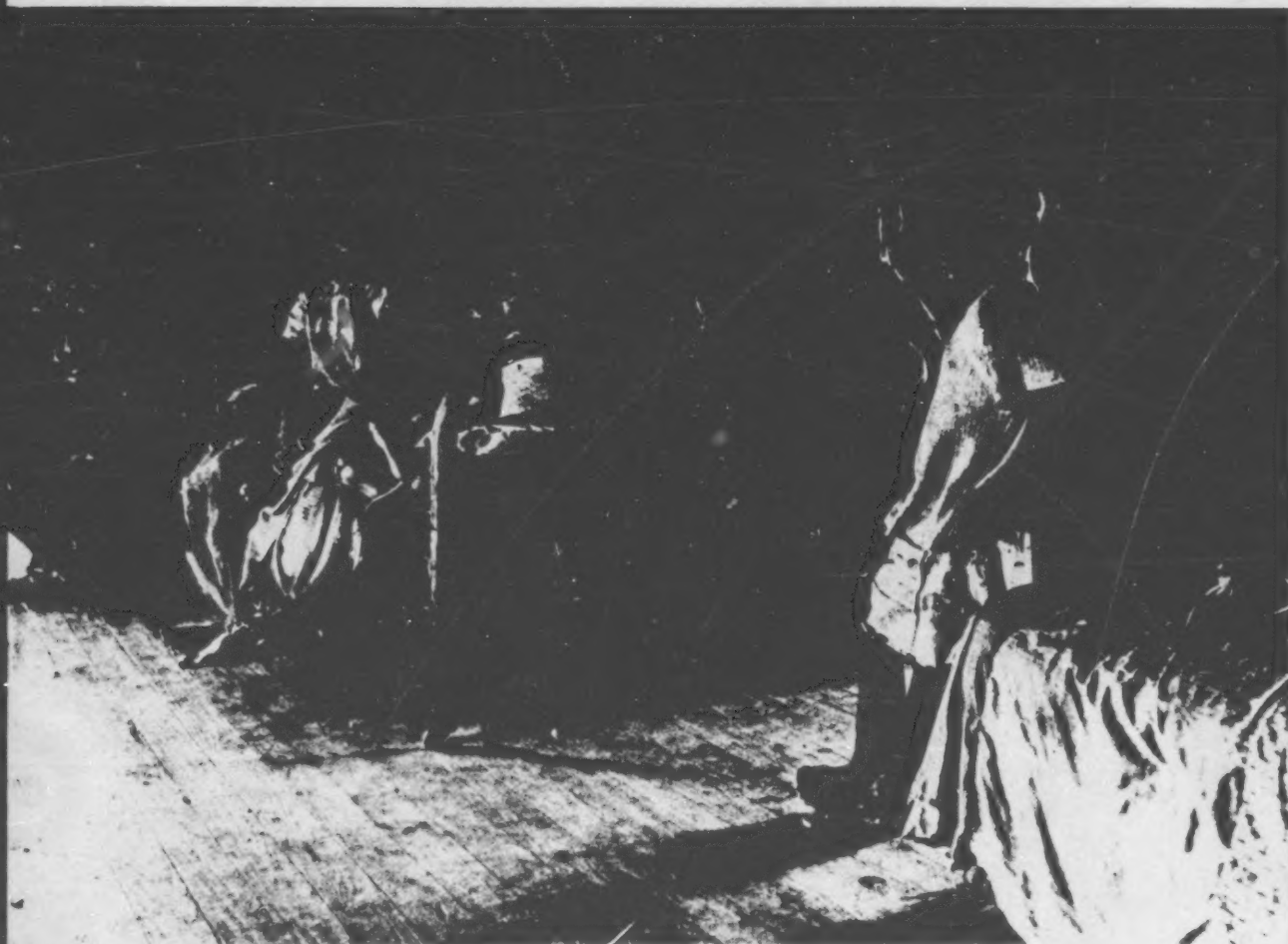
WE HAIN'T HAD NO CHRISTMAS HERE, NOT A APPLE or a nut or nothin': I told the chil'en not to look for no Santa Claus this year, but to thank their God if they had meat and bread." Gracie Turner folds her arms across her husband's brown shirt which she wears over her worn red dress for a sweater and leaves her wash tub in the back yard to show the way to the cheerless fire-place where green wood smolders.





"Dis here is my father, Sam Horton. He has seen some years. He's ninety-one and in tole'ble good health, except his 'memb'ance ain't strong and he can't eat much grease. I've been takin' care o' him now for seven years, best I could. For the past three months he's been gettin' seven dollars and a half for de old age pension, and dat's been a help here.

"Dat's Ola in de corner." Gracie indicates an attractive mulatto girl who looks almost dainty in spite of her ragged clothes. Her feet are bare. "Ola" is twenty-four. Awhile back she married a drinkin' man, but he scrapped so bad she couldn't stay wid him; so she come back home to live. Dis girl is Amy, fourteen years old. She's got bad kidney trouble; her leg swells up big as two sometimes. Dr. Simpson started givin' her treatments in de clinic, but she ain't had none in some weeks now." Amy is also barefooted.



"De littlest boy is Raymond Farmer. Dr. Farmer 'fore he died named him for his brother, Judge Raymond Farmer. Stephen is de oldest boy at home. Sam and Will belongs to my daughters, but I raised 'em. Will, go tote in some wood and stir up dis here fire! Will's mama married de second time, and I didn't know how dat new man would treat de child. Wid my husband, James Turner, and Papa and me, dat makes nine of us to stay in dese two rooms. Come on; I'll show you over de house.

"Most of us sleeps on dese three beds in here where we keeps de fire. In here is de kitchen. Mr. Jake Anderson give me dat range; it's de one Miss Bettie fust cooked on when she was married." The old stove is coated with grease, but the kitchen is orderly and fairly clean. At the table, covered with colorful oil-cloth, are two long benches where the Turners sit to dine. The bowl of cold collards gives off a penetrating odor even to the front door.

"Right across de hall is de other bedroom. Come on see dat too. De girls covered dese chairs and dis settce wid de flowered cloth deyselves. Dat victrola ain't no good now. We tries to keep dis room sort o' dressed up for comp'ny, but dey ain't no fire in de heater; so we better set in de fireplace room. Today's a cold day if you ain't about stirrin'.

"Now, 'bout de other chil'en: Hattie May lives on some island down here 'bout Portsmouth—Hattie May Williams she is now. Her husband does public work and seems to be a right good man, but I didn't know where he'd be good to Hattie May's Will or not. May married Montgomery, and dey sharecraps for Miss Sallie Simpson over toward Benton. Edward's married and farms for Mr. Peter Ellis at Martinsburg. Lillian Turner—now I can't tell you 'bout her, 'cause I hain't heard from her in three years. Marcy works for rich folks in Philadelphia. She sent us a box o' old clothes 'fore Christmas, and dat's de onliest string we've had this fall. De rich folks is always givin' Marcy wrist watches and necklaces and things for presents. Dey sends her down town any time wid a hund'ed dollars to buy things for 'em, and she takes every cent back to 'em it don't cost. Dey has learnt to trust Marcy. I's tried to raise my chil'en to be trusty and mannerable, to mind dey mama and papa, to be honest. 'Show favor to your mother and father,' I tells 'em, 'dat your days may be lengthened on God's earth.' If dey does wrong it shore ain't 'cause I hain't tried to learn 'em right.

"Dey ain't been much schoolin' for none of 'em. Will's in de fif', and Lillian got to de ninth. None de rest got past de fou'th grade. Turner went to school enough to write his name, but he can't do no figgerin' to 'mount to nothin'. I never went a day in my life, can't write my name or add or keep track of our account on de farm. I want dese youngest chil'en to go long enough to do dat much.



"Tain't no while to say dis is de hardest year we's ever had. Every year's been hard, de forty-nine years I been here. Dat's all dey is to expect—work hard and go hongry part time—long as we lives on de other mǎn's land. Dey ain't nothin' in sharecrappin', not de way it's run. My folks has always sharecrapped. Papa farmed round Gum Springs when I was a girl, and all I learnt was to work in de field. When I married Turner, we lived in Hawley, Virginia, 'bout six months. He done public work, railroadin' and sech dere. From Hawley we moved to a farm near Gum Springs, where we worked by de day for a year. From dere we moved to my brother's and sharecrapped for him five years.

Den we moved to Mr. Calep Jones', where we stayed three years. Next we moved to Mr. Hughes Whitehead's and farmed wid him two years. Our next move was to No'th Ca'lina on Mr. Jake Anderson's farm at de Wooilen place. We stayed wid him thirteen years. Den last year we moved here to de Willis place, dat Mr. Dick Henry rents from Mr. Bob Willis in Gum Springs, and here we is now. But we got to move somewhere dis next year. Another man's a-comin' here. I don't know where we'll go; houses is sca'ce and hard to find. Mr. Makepeace told 'Turner he'd help him all he could, but he ain't got no house we can live in. Plenty o' land everywhere, but no house! 'Turner has been huntin' a place for weeks, and every night when he comes home I runs to de door to hear de news. Every day it's de same tale: 'I hain't found no place yet.' I hates to move; nobody knows how I hates to move!"

"Yonder's somebody movin' now," Ola exclaims, looking out the window. All eyes turn toward the road. Over the deep ruts in the sand, wagon wheels grind slowly eastward; two wagons loaded with shabby furnishings wind around the curve out of sight.

"Dat's de way we'll be soon—tore up and a-movin'.



I wish I could have me one acre o' land dat I could call mine. I'd be willin' to eat dry bread de rest o' my life if I had a place I could settle down on and nobody could tell me I had to move no more. I hates movin'.

"We left Mr. Jake Anderson 'cause he didn't treat us right. Me and him fussed de whole thirteen years we stayed dere, and I said if I kept livin' wid Mr. Anderson I'd go to de devil shore. When Mr. Anderson use to give de money to Turner, he'd tell him: 'Don't you give none of it to dat fussy woman.' I quarreled all de time 'bout him givin' money to de boys and chargin' it 'gainst our account. We always had trouble settlin' wid Mr. Anderson. One year I got me a book and ask him to set down everything he charged us wid in my book, so I'd have it in his own figgers when de year ended. But he said he wouldn't have it dat way; one set o' books was all he aimed to keep. So den I got to askin' him every week what he was chargin' us wid, and my daughter set it down. At de end o' de year we got Mr. James to add it up on de addin' machine. We handed it to Mr. Anderson when we went to settle, and it made him mad. He said we'd settle by his figgers or get off'n de place, dat nobody should keep books but him on his farm.

"Another time when we wanted a car, he bought us one over in Weldon, but made us put up the two mules we owned den against de car. De boys was in a wreck and damaged de car right smart. Mr. Anderson come and took in de mules and de car too. After he had it fixed up, we tried to get him to sell it back to us. He wouldn't, but went and sold it to another man. So we was lackin' a car and mules too.

"Mr. Anderson was all time orderin' us to get off'n his place. He's mighty fitified anyhow, and when somethin' didn't suit him he'd order us to move. One Christmas we ask him for fifty dollars for some clothes and a little Santy Claus for the chil'en. Dey was 'bout twelve of us den to take care of. Mr. Anderson said we shouldn't have de money and for us to mōve. We done it. Dey was a little house close to Maryton where we moved into, but 'twa'n't long 'fore here come Mr. Anderson orderin' us to move back. He finally offered us de fifty dollars, 'cause he knowed we was good hands. We was mighty slow dat time 'bout movin' back to his farm; he got uneasy 'fore we did go back.

"We never made nothin' much wid Mr. Anderson. De most we cleared was \$179, after we'd paid out, two years. Most years it was fifty and sixty dollars after de account was paid. Every settlement day me and him had a round. I'd tell him he had too much charged against us, and he'd say I was de fussin'est woman he ever saw, and to go to de devil! De last year we was

wid him we made 'leben bales o' cotton and three hundred bags o' peas. When we settled, we didn't have accordin' to his figgers but five dollars for our part o' de crap, nothin' to buy a string o' clothes wid, nothin' to eat but meat and bread. We left him. We had to sell de hogs we raised to eat to buy us some clothes. We hain't never got no rent money. I said somethin' to Mr. Anderson last time I saw him 'bout de rent. We needs it for clothes and shoes; the chil'en's feet is on de ground. It made him mad; he said he hadn't got no rent. Turner went over to Benton and ask about it. Dey said it wa'n't right, but Mr. Anderson was holdin' de cotton and peas for higher prices dey reckoned; de rent would come by 'n' by dey reckoned.

"When we started farmin' in March for Mr. Dick Henry, he 'lowed us five dollars a week. On de tenth o' June dey took him to de State Hospital, and Miss Annie got her brother, Mr. Bates, to tend to de farm for her. He owned up he didn't know nothin' 'bout farmin'. Fust, dey started out lettin' us have \$3.50 a week; den it dwindled down to two, den to nothin'. Miss Annie said she dreaded for Sad'dys to come 'cause we was lookin' to her for money for rations, and she didn't have it. I couldn't fuss wid her, 'cause I knowed she was tellin' de truth. Mr. Bates brought some hogs here and told us to raise 'em on halves. I toted 'em slogs all th'ugh de summer and fed 'em co'n; here dis fall he took 'em away from us, on our debt he claimed. Turner traded his gun for a mother hog and three little pigs, all we got now. De same way wid de co'n. Mr. Bates commenced haulin' it away. I told him le's wait and see what de cotton and peanuts 'mounted to and den divide de co'n equal 'tween us. He said naw, he wa'n't goin' to dat way. Cou'se I knowed we couldn't make much, but looked like we was bound to have some co'n for our bread. I went in de field and begun loadin' me a one-ho'se wagon o' co'n, but he objected. So all I got out'n de crap was a barrel o' nubbins dat I took anyhow.

"Mr. Henry come home 'fore Christmas and 'pears to be all right now. We hain't had no settlement wid him yet, but he told us dey wouldn't be nothin' for us



this year, not to look for it. De account on de book 'gainst us is \$300. How it got dat much I can't tell you. We raised 224 bags o' peas and 1800 pounds o' seed cotton on twenty acres. I knowed we couldn't make no crap, wid just twenty-four bags o' plaster 'lowed us to fertilize twenty acres. We was just about to get hongry here, with all de money cut off and no crap comin' in. Long as dey was cotton to pick or peas to shake some of us could get a day o' work now and then, enough to buy a sack o' flour and a little strip o' meat. Work has been sca'ce dis fall though. So Turner got him a WP and A job a-diggin' stumps. He's done had three pay days, \$12.80 at de time, though he don't get but \$12 'cause eighty cents has to go to Mr. Sickles for haulin' him to work. I makes dat twelve dollars do all it will, but dey's eight of us to live out'n it four weeks to de month.

"Turner ought not to be a-workin' wid de WP and A. De gover'ment's got no business a-payin' out relief money and a-givin' WP and A jobs to farmers. De old age pensions is all right for old folks dat's 'flicted and can't do. Take Papa dere; he can't work in de



field now. He knocks up our wood to burn in de fire-place, but he's seen too many years to get out and work by de day. But able-bodied landers has got no business a-havin' to look to de gover'ment for a livin'. Dey ought to live off'n de land. If 'twas fixed right dey'd make all de livin' dey need from de ground. Dey ain't no sense in diggin' stumps for dollars to buy co'n and flour-bread and meat, when here's plenty o' land to raise 'em on. Every lander ought to raise his somethin' t' eat de whole year round and some to sell. Everybody's got to eat; dat's 'bout all wages comes to anyhow, somethin' t' eat. If I had de say half de land would be planted in stuff to eat; nobody would have to furnish me and overcharge me when settlement time come.

"I always tries to raise my meat and bread and lard, collards and sweet 'taters for de winter, and a gyarden for de summer. I keeps a cow. Milk and butter and



biscuit is de biggest we live on now. I has to use butter in my biscuits for lard part de time. My collards hain't flourished 'dis year like usual. You see 'em dere at de front. Lacks like hot water has been poured over 'em. De soil here don't suit collards; it's too pore to raise anything without plenty fertilize. Mr. Henry furnished de mule dis year and we de fertilize, but dey wouldn't stand for much; cou'se dey wouldn't sell it to us on our say. I believes de bugs dats eatin' up stuff now is sent 'cause folks is so mean. If dey don't do better, plagues is goin' to take de land. I tries to live a Christian, tell de truth, and be honest, but de world is full of dem dat don't. It ain't often I gets to church. I hain't been in over twelve months. Roanoke-Salem is where we 'tends, but I'm tellin' you de God's truth: I hain't had nothin' fittin' to wear to church lately; de chil'en neither. Amy had a print dress she could wear dis summer, but soon as cold weather come, she had to

quit church and school both 'cause she didn't have no jacket to wear. I don't go nowheres, never been nowheres, but to work. Picture show? I never saw one in my life. De onliest far ways I ever been was on a excursion one time to Portsmouth.

"No, it's been nothin' but hard work for Gracie, and de boss man gettin' it all. I's known some good uns. Mr. Calep Jones was a pore man, but he was straight and fair in his dealin's. We got every cent we was due when we lived wid him. De years we was wid him we cleared \$200, de most we ever made. Mr. Jones's dead, but if he ain't in heb'n ain't nobody dere. Once Papa farmed for a rich man, and he was good too. Every Christmas dat come he give all de tenants on his place a sack o' apples and nuts and candy."

Amy rises from her corner to warm her bare feet at the dying fire. Gracie looks from the window and sees the mother hog rooting in the front yard. "Sam, go run de hog out'n de yard." She pushes her tin snuff



box more securely in the shirt pocket and leans her head an instant on the foot of the bed. "My head's been afflicted a long time; somethin' pops and rings in it right constant. It ain't bad as it was once though; it use to run corruption th'ugh my years, and I had to keep 'em washed out wid salt water. Dey don't ooze corruption now. Turner's health is pretty good; he's 'flicted with rheumatism, but he works as hard at sixty-five as he ever done. I don't have de doctor much; dey's old home remedies I tries fust, and if dey fails den de doctor has to try his hand. Dat bottle o' castor oil up dere on de mantel is de old stand-by here. When de flu was goin' round so bad I mixed castor oil and turpentine and sprinkled a few drops on de chil'en's hair,

and not a one o' dem had de flu. Fluck is good too; it's a weed I use for a purkitive. When de chil'en was teethin' I use to tie fluck round dey necks. It costs too much to send for de doctor. Right now we owes de Roanoke Rapids Horspital \$1.50 for Amy. She was in a wreck up here 'bout Camp's store and got five teeth knocked out and her legs bruised up right bad. Dey took her to de horspital where she ought to stayed two or three days, but we wa'n't able to pay, so we had to bring her home. She gets in a quare fix some nights, just lies dere and can't speak or move."

"It's de witches ridin' me," Amy announces casually.

"Do you reckon dey is sech a thing?" Gracie inquires earnestly. "I tells her it's de blood stops circulatin', how come her to have dem spells."

"How come I gets all right soon as I puts a fork under my pillow?" Amy wants to know. "Or a broom under my bed or a butcher knife under my pillow either?"

"I don't know. Dey's things can't be explained in dis world. When we lived in de Woollen house I use to hear strange things. One night I knelt to say my prayers, and I heard a woman walk in de door on high heel slippers. I looked round right quick, but dey wa'n't nobody dere. Another time after I was in bed I heard somebody take de chair settin' by my bed and move it erost de room. Somethin' was all time sweepin' de floors; you could hear somethin' like a straw broom go sweep-sweep, sweep-sweep, but you couldn't never see nothin', least I couldn't."

"I saw a little white boy standin' on de hearth one day; he had on overalls and was plain to me as my hand. Den he vanished," declares Amy.



"Some folks can see things dat others can't," Gracie admits. "Folks born 'tween de lights can see things. Amy was born 'tween sunrise and sunset, how come she sees things de rest can't. Most of 'em was born in de night time. I reckon it's her blood not circulatin' dat makes her have dem spells at night, not de witches."

"De witches use to ride me," old Sam speaks up from his corner. "I felt one hop on me one night, and I couldn't move or speak; I was pretty shore who, so next day I told her I was goin' to put a butcher knife under my pillow and kill de next witch tried to ride me to death. I wa'n't bothered no more. Dey was witches back den when I growed up. Dey use to jump out'n

dey skin, and sometimes when folks found witches' skin behind de door dey filled it wid red pepper. When de witch got back into her skin she begun to holler: 'Slip, skin, slip; slip, skin, slip.' Folks put sifters under dey beds back den so de witches had to go th'ugh every hole 'fore dey could bother anybody.

"I was a slave on de Horton plantation up in Virginia. Old mistis and old marster was good to dey slaves, and I loved young marster next to God A'mighty. When he went off to de war, I stole away and follered him. He looked round and saw me comin' and holler'd: 'You little devil, what you think I goin' to do wid you?' I stayed and waited on him at de camp till he had chance to go home and take me back. Den he slipped off from me and went back to de war. I stole away and follered him again. 'You little nigger. You can't stay here. I'm goin' to send you back home.' But I stayed on wid him when dey was fightin' round Richmond. Dey use to have big times in de camp, playin' and singin' and pickin' de banjo. I 'member dey sung 'Rally to de flag, boys, fight for freedom.' One night I looked out and saw de Yankees comin', and I woke young marster. De soldiers went away from dere. After dey'd been fightin' four days round Richmond, I looked down on de field, and looked like I couldn't see nothin' but blood. I fainted. But I wouldn't go home and leave my young marster till he moved away from Richmond. Den I had to go back home and stay.

"News come dat de Yankees was on de way to our plantation. Old marster sent de women to another plantation, and he stayed on and buried de silver and valu'bles out in de gyarden under de rose bushes. De Yankees got dere 'fore he could run where de women had gone; so he slipped out in de field and lay down flat between de rows. It rained and hailed on him three days, and he didn't have a mou'ful to eat.

"De Yankees broke in de smokehouse, brought big middlin's o' meat in de great-house, and throwed 'em on de fire whole. Dey cooked it a little on one side, turned it over, browned it on t'other, den dey eat it. Seem like it made me mad to see 'em eatin' our meat, and I stood watchin' 'em and wishin' de soldiers would come. One Yankee looked round and saw what I was thinkin' I reckon. 'You little devil, what you doin' here?' he said and slapped my face. Dat was de fust time I ever 'membered hatin' de Yankees; I knowed den how come dey was called dam' Yankees. I made up my mind if he hit me again I'd get de butcher knife and cut his th'oat. Dey ask my mammy if any silver was

hid round dere; she told 'em not as she knowed of. Dey went to de gyarden, dug up de rose bushes, and found all de treasure old Marster had hid. You couldn't hide nothin' from dem Yankees. Dey could track worse'n dogs.

"Den dey went to the cellar where eight barrels o' 'lasses was settin'. Dey knocked de barrels open; de cellar was waist-deep in 'lasses. Next dey set de house on fire and burned everything up at de great house 'fore dey went on to de next plantation. When old mistis come home she ask us where was old marster. We told her de last we saw o' him was when he was slippin' crost de field. All hands went out to look for him. We found him lyin' 'tween de rows so near froze to death he couldn't move. We brought him to de quarters, built up a big fire, and laid him before it. Soon as we thawed him out he died. Dem was hard days back den."

"Dey's still hard." Gracie droops dejectedly in her chair and covers her face momentarily with her hands. "Farmin's all I ever done, all I can do, all I want to do And I can't make a livin' at it."

"I reckon I soon farm as anything else," Amy observes.

"I rather go in service. I want to be a cook or maid for white folks," Ola adds. "I can cook some al ready and I could learn more."



Gracie raises her head, but she remains downcast in spirit. "Dis year has been so hard we've had to drop our burial insurance. We enrolled wid de burial association in Ga'ysburg some years back. All it cost is twenty-five cents when a member dies. But dey don't come many twenty-five centses in dis house.

"Every night I prays to de Lord: 'Please keep death off till I get out'n dis shape.' Dey ain't a decent rag to bury me if I was to die right now, and I hates for de county to have to put me away."

BEENICE KELLY HARRIS

GET OUT AND HOE

This selection is also taken from These Are Our Lives.

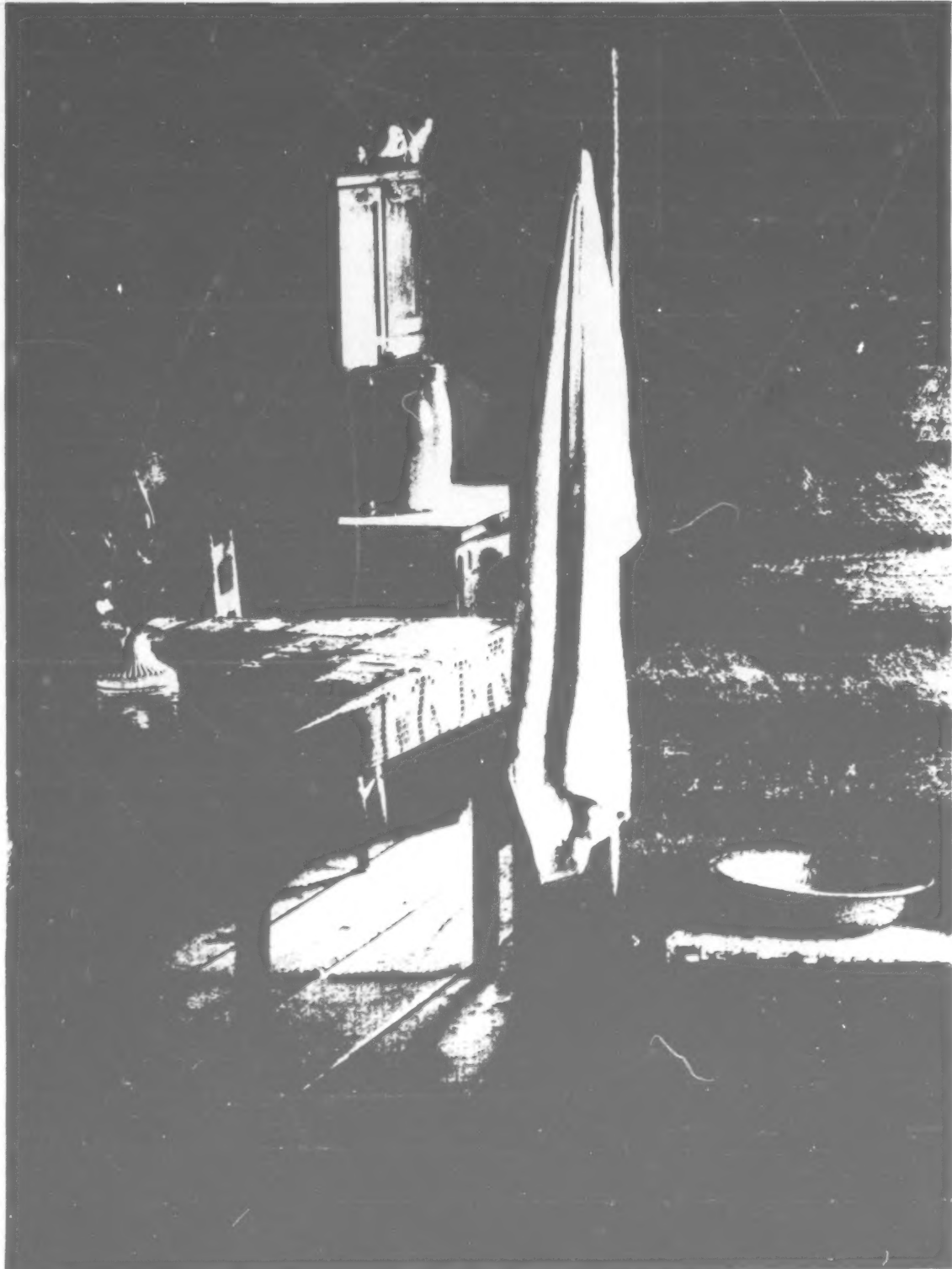
No, I don't mind tellin' you about me and Morrison and the young'uns. Won't you sit down. Ollie! Bring out another chair. We got company. People don't come around so often. Sometime Uncle Hank comes from across the creek to see us. We



get sort of lonesome. I'm mighty glad to have somebody to talk to. I use to tell Morrison our lives would make a good true story—like you read in the magazines and hear on the radio—Ma Perkins and the others. Oh, yes! We got a radio—a battery set. You see, we ain't got no electric power. We listen to all the good stories and string music. Sometimes we buy things they sell on the radio . . . medicine and other things.

"I guess we been hard luck renters all our lives, me and Morrison both. They was ten young-uns in my family, and I was next to the youngest. We had it awful hard—I reckon my father was about the meanest there ever was—he used to beat me and run me out of the house, but I'd come back when he cooled off. It was his hot-headedness that ruined us. They was a neighbor, Sam Hicklin, that lived near us. His farm run next to ours, and one day he come over to the house and told my father that he was plantin' corn all the way over on his land, and he had better put up a fence and watch out. My father told him to tend to his own business and this made Sam mad. Next day, when my father went out to work, he saw a big ditch cut right down through the middle of his corn-field. Old Sam was settin' on a fence watchin' him. They started cussin' and in a minute they was throwin' rocks at each other. Well, both of 'em got lawyers and took it to court. The judge divided the land halfway between the ditch and the end of the cornfield, but this didn't do any good, because when the case was settled, the lawyers' bills was so big they couldn't pay it. The lawyers got the farms and left Sam Hicklin and us without anything. The lawyers sold our farm and we had to move out. That was when I was nineteen.

"We went to Yadkin County and rented an old run-down farm for a share of what we could raise. The crops wasn't any good that year, the landlord came and got what we had raised and had the auctioneers come and sell our tools and furniture. They was a bunch of people at the sale that day from all around. I was standin' there watchin' the man sell the things when I saw a good lookin' man in overalls lookin' toward me. He watched me all during the sale and I knew what he was thinkin'. That was the first time I ever saw Morrison. I reckon he fell in love with me right off, for we were married a few days later. Morrison didn't have no true father. His mother wasn't married, and he was raised up by his kin folks. Then we moved to a little farm near Shortridge, about ten miles away. The owner said we could have three-fourths of what we raised. The first two years the crops turned out pretty good so we could pay off the landlord and buy a little furniture . . . a bed and table and some chairs. Then the first baby came on. That was Berhard.



He's out in the field workin' now, suckerin' tobacco. By that time, we was able to get a cow, and that came in good, for the baby was awful thin and weak.

"After that, things didn't go so good. Another baby come on and we had our hands full takin' care of the two children and lookin' after the farm work. When the second baby was four years old, he started gettin' pale and thin. We put him to bed one day because he looked so sick we thought he was goin' to die. We didn't call a doctor for a long while. You see, we didn't have any money then, and we'd heard that the doctor up in town wouldn't come unless you had the money ready. But Morrison said he didn't care, so one night after dark he started walkin' through the woods toward the highway. He caught a ride into town and about two hours later, him and the doctor drove up in the yard.

"When the doctor finished lookin' at the baby, he turned around with a worried look on his face and said he had meningitis. That was some kind of ailment that got in his back. The next, he got awful sick and when the doctor come again, my little boy had a stroke of infantile paralysis. He died the next day. After we had buried him up at the church cemetery, we went on with our work. There wasn't much we could do but try to forget about little Sammy. But we did love him so much. I go to his grave and put flowers on it every Sunday.

"The crops was comin' in and we had to work hard to get the tobacco suckered and cured before the market opened, or else we couldn't pay the landlord his share, come fall.

"Bernard was only six, but he could help a lot, pullin' and tyin' the tobacco, and helpin' hand it in the barn. We got out more tobacco that year than any other, but when we took it to market in Winston, they wasn't payin' but about twelve cents a pound for the best grade, so when we give the landlord his share and paid the fertilizer bill, we didn't have enough left to pay the doctor and store bill. We didn't know what we was goin' to do durin' the winter. Morrison had raised a few vegetables and apples, so we canned what we could and traded the rest for some cotton cloth up at the store so the children would have something to wear that winter. Morrison got a job helpin' build a barn for



for a neighbor, but it didn't last but two days. The neighbor gave him two second hand pairs of overalls for the work.

"That was one of the hardest years we come to. Next spring another baby was born. That made four. You see, we'd already had another one, a girl, before little Sammy died. This one was a boy. He was the strongest and healthiest one we'd had yet. I loved him so much, because I thought he would take the place of little Sammy. Just before he was one year old, Morrison said we ought to bake a cake for his birthday. I was in the kitchen bakin' the cake and some pies, when I heard little Tom start cryin'. I ran to see what was the matter, and he was layin' on the floor, all pale and sick lookin'. I put him in bed and ran out toward the field and called Morrison . . . he was hoein' corn. When Morrison looked at Tom, he said: "It looks like a bad spell. I'm goin' after the doctor." I'll never forget how scared I was while I waited for Morrison to come back. I sat there beside little Tom holding a wet rag on his head, and prayin' he'd get well. I recollect how I prayed that night. I said, "Oh, God, please don't let him die like little Sammy. He's the only baby I've got."

"Morrison and the doctor came; little Tom was awful hot. The doctor looked at him a minute then turned around to me and Morrison.

" 'He's been dead half an hour.' I guess he must've died while I was prayin'.

"Next spring when we was plantin' tobacco, Morrison got to leavin' home every night, and comin' in about midnight. I didn't know what he was doin' till one of the neighbors that lived up the road tole me that he had seen Morrison goin' up to the Carson house every night. The Carsons didn't have any children but a girl named Amelia Carson lived with them. She was som kin to them. Amelia was sixteen years old and pretty, too, but she had a bad name. A month after Morrison started goin' up to her house, they ran off together. That was the first time I started gettin' relief from the government. They was a government woman that come around and gave orders for food and clothes, and sometimes we got a little money. I needed it awful bad, because with Morrison gone, they wasn't any way to feed the two children. I had to do most of the work in the field that summer, and sometimes I would go to the neighbors' house and wash for them for a piece of meat.

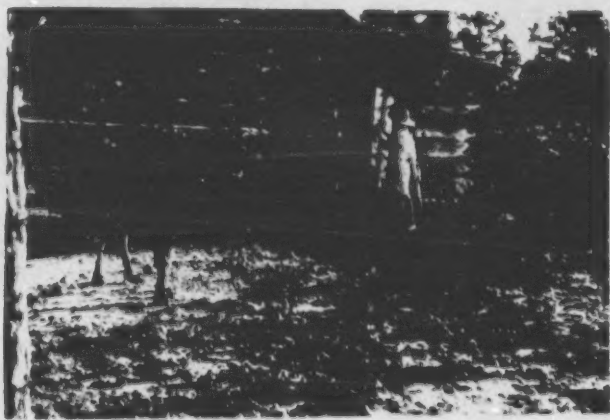
"Then, about two months after Morrison and Amelia ran off, the sheriff down in the sandhills, in the eastern part of the State, found them livin' together. They brought Amelia back home but they didn't get Morrison. A month later, I was settin' in the kitchen sewin' when Morrison walked in. He looked kinda' bad like he'd been hungry for a long time. He sat down in a chair in front of the fire, like he was awful tired and said to me:

" 'I been a damn fool, Irma. That crazy woman didn't want nothin' but my money. You ain't mad at me, are you, Irma?'

"I said: 'I ain't got no right to be mad now, Morrison. You had your fling' and done come home. We need you awful bad. We got to get out and hoe in the tobacco tomorrow. You better get some sleep.'

"About six months later, Amelia had a baby. Right off, she blamed it on Morrison. When she took it to court, Morrison denied it—said it was just as apt to be somebody else's baby. But the judge said he was guilty and told him to pay Amelia fifty dollars. Morrison didn't have any money then, so he went to jail and served twenty-one days. Accordin' to the law, he had paid his debt. That was the fourth baby Amelia had . . . all of 'em born out of wedlock. Only two of 'em are living now. She had two by one man. I still can't believe Morrison was the father on one of the children. Anyway, that's all in the past now, and today there's no better man than Morrison. This year he gave a week's labor on the Methodist Church at Center. That was when they built a new part to it. All the men in the neighborhood that can't give money help on it. Morrison has always give his share.

"Things are a lot better for the renter today than in the past. It used to be we couldn't get enough to eat and wear. Now we got a cow, a hog, and some chickens. Morrison bought a second-hand car and every Sunday afternoon we ride somewhere. It's the only time we ever get away from home.



"The landlord gives us five-sixths of what we raise, so we get along pretty good when the crops are fair. Of course, we have to furnish the fertilizer and livestock. This year we had seven barns of tobacco and four acres of corn. Wheat turned out pretty good, too. We raised forty-three bushels, and I hear the price is going to be fair at the roller mill. I canned about all our extra fruits and vegetables. I reckon we still got about a hundred cans in the pantry.

"We never owned any land, but Morrison and me just bought a house. It's the old school house down the road about two miles. We bought it from the county for \$270. We only got \$150 paid but we can pay the rest after next year's crop. They's only one thing bad about it though. It's right next door to where Amelia Carson lives—with her children. It's goin' to be hard to face her after what happened between her and Morrison. It'll take a lot of courage, I guess—more'n I've got. I don't think she'll attempt again, though. He's learned his lesson.

"Some day we hope to own our own land as well as the house. It might be a long time, but with the grace of God we'll get there. It seems like that man in Washington has got a real love for the poor people in his heart, and I believe it's due to him and his helpers that the poor renters are goin' to get a chance. We've got more hope now than we ever had before.

"I'm mighty glad you stopped to see us. Won't you come again? We'll be livin' in the new place then, I reckon."

Questions for Discussion

1. Hattie May Williams' husband does "public work." What do you think is meant by this term?
2. What do you personally find the most moving from these two stories? Why?
3. What do you think is meant in the second narrative by the term "hard luck renters?"
4. From these two stories, would you say that life as a sharecropper was more difficult for the man or the woman? Why?

VI SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS' UNION
AND NEW DEAL

THE SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS' UNION



Dorothea Lange/FSA

Introduction

In the summer of 1934, eleven white men and seven black men met in a one-room schoolhouse on the Arkansas Delta and organized themselves into a "tenants' union." For the croppers, already living on subsistence wages from one "furnish" to the next, the decline in cotton prices brought on by the Depression had been disastrous. The New Deal's answer to the crisis, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's (AAA) acreage reduction program, pushed sharecroppers off the land while it rewarded the planters with parity payments. Thousands of tenants and sharecroppers were evicted and forced to find work as day laborers or go on relief programs.

By the time the croppers met at the Sunnyside School, other forces were in play throughout Arkansas that were to reinforce and interact with the newly formed union. Coal miners were striking in the northwest section of the state and fighting with the United Mine Workers for control of their local union. In the Ozark Mountain town of Mena, Commonwealth College was training labor leaders. Nearby in the town of Ink, refugees from the Llano Cooperative Colony in Louisiana had established still another cooperative venture. In Paris, Claude and Joyce Williams were using the church to organize the unemployed, to hold classes in political education, and to aid the striking miners. The Socialist Party, organized earlier in the Tyronza area, had already held one state convention, boasted a sizable membership, and had brought Norman Thomas into the area to speak.

Uppermost in the minds of those planning the union was the memory of what had happened in Arkansas fifteen years earlier when black sharecroppers in Elaine had attempted to organize. Issac Shaw recalled that event, known as the Elaine Massacre, and gave a moving plea as to why the union had to be integrated: black people couldn't do it on their own without inviting racial slaughter.

It is probable that at least some of the organizers in the room that evening were aware of a similar attempt at sharecropper organizing in Alabama. The Alabama Sharecroppers Union (SCU) had been organized in 1931 by the Communist Party in response to requests from black croppers and day laborers who complained that the landlords had set day wages at 50 cents per day for men and 25 cents a day for women. The union organized around several demands including food advances through settlement time, the right for the sharecroppers to sell their own time, day wages paid in cash, and a nine month school term for black children. A skirmish outside a union meeting one night at Camp Hill ended in a gun battle and the subsequent repression quieted activity in the area and

sent the nascent union underground. The following year the union emerged in Reeltown and ended in another gun battle, recorded in John Beecher's poem *In Egypt Land*.*

Although it was not the first attempt by sharecroppers to rebel against the viciousness of the plantation caste system, the organization of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) was to have far-reaching effect in bringing the "plight of the sharecropper" to the nation's consciousness. Subjected to continuous harassment and intimidation by the landed gentry and their hired lawmen, the union nevertheless continued to grow in both membership and mass appeal. Throughout the '30's and into the early war years it spread to six southern states. Stubbornly maintaining its union structure despite rebuffs by both the CIO and AFL, it became a mass movement—a movement that people joined with the enthusiasm they normally saved for their religion, a movement that gave common people the means to organize and fight for the right to live decent and productive lives.

It is not our intention here to tell the full story of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, nor to analyze the conditions out of which it grew.† What we present here are first person accounts by six people who were active participants in the union as organizers, national and local officers, and local members. George Stith was a young man when he joined the STFU and was quickly made secretary of his Cotton Plant local because he could write; Clay East was converted to socialism when he read *Letters to Jud* by Upton Sinclair because "it just made sense." He took in the first members of the union when it was organized at the Sunnyside School and remained active in the union for the next year; Mrs. Naomi Williams was a member of an STFU local in the Gould area; J.R. Butler taught school for a while near his home town of Pangburn, but was working for his brother at the sawmill when he attended the first state socialist convention in Arkansas. He was President of the union from 1935 to 1942, the union's most active and productive years. H.L. Mitchell is an acknowledged co-founder of the union, and served in an executive capacity up through the time the union was known as the National Farm Labor Union until its affiliation with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen. Carrie Dilworth served as secretary of the Gould local, helped the union raise money by speaking nationally, and coordinated the transport of labor to work in the canneries during the war years.

The stories that follow are excerpted from recorded interviews conducted by the Institute for Southern Studies.

Hard Times

STITH: I was born in Baxter, in Drew County, Arkansas, in 1916. I stayed there until I was five years old. Then we moved to Tiller, Arkansas, down the road about 15 or 20 miles, on the land of T.P. Perry. My father left the farm when I was somewhere around six or seven and went to work for the US government as a detective, for this squad that looked into vice. He worked on assignment, but he wouldn't tell us just what his job was. He joined up in St. Louis where the division headquarters was. He taken it up because he wanted to get away from the farm. At that time on the plantations in the South, you didn't have too much security. You wasn't independent. You did as the plantation owner or agent say do; you taken what they give you, and that's about it.

We travelled a lot until 1930. His health got bad and he resigned. I found later, after I was grown, that he resigned partly because he almost got killed several times, and my mother had just decided that she didn't want him in the service. That's the reason he got out. And he went to work in Illinois at a steel plant where they make steam heaters and radiators, but some of the chemicals they used there went against his health. So he had to leave that and that's why we came back to southeast Missouri to the farm.

First we went to Tiptonville, Tennessee, to pick cotton. That was in 1926, if I remember right. Then he decided he would go back to the farm; that it was best for him. So we came back to southeast Missouri and started sharecropping.

I think they looked at it as a step down, but then they looked at farming as a way of life and that's it. This was a way of making it. They felt that they had to make some kind of plan where the family could be kept together and that's what they did. His health didn't get too good. We moved to the farm and after about three years his health got so bad, he wasn't able to work. My mother's health wasn't good enough for her to work either. I had a brother next to me that they let my grandmother who always lived near us keep, and this only left two boys at home.

Now here's what happened to my education. The time he got disabled to work and she was disabled to work, we lived on a small plantation. The man had 14 head of mule. It was a pretty good size plantation for mule farming. Every sharecropper had a pair of mules, and that pair of mules had to work. You lived in his house. So when my father got down sick and couldn't work, then I had to quit school and take over. I barely finished what we called elementary and that's all the schooling I got, and the most anybody got in the family.

People asked me, "What you gonna do with the 14 acres of cotton?" I said, "I'm gon' work it," and lord know, I don't know how I figured I was gonna work it. I just figured I had it to do. I was the only one to work and that was just it. So I dropped out of school and went out and got the crop ready, planted it. When it come time to chop, the owner of the plantation said, "What you gon' do about the cotton?" I said, "I'm gon' work it, I'm gon' try." He looked at me and he said, "You got more nerve than any boy I ever seen. I'll tell you what to do. You get a pair of mules in the lot. You plow your crop and after that I've got a hay crop, you can plow for me. I'll see that the cotton is chopped and what's left over I'll charge it to the crop." So that's the way we worked it. We worked on through hay season which at that time was all done by mules. When we finished with hay season I had enough money coming that I had worked over for him, more over than the cotton chopping was worth, to buy me a suit of clothes. It was the first long pants suit of clothes I ever had.

When I wasn't working the crop I worked out on farms, baling hay and cutting timber as a day laborer. I made more money by working than we did out of the crop. I don't remember how much it was we made from the crop; you never was told that. But I know the money from the crop wasn't too much, because we bought winter groceries. I know, I went with my parents when they went to trade. They bought a barrel of flour, a 50-pound sack of sugar, beans and rice. That was it.

In the last part of '34 after the crops were harvested, we came to Arkansas. The man we moved with sent a truck to move us from southeast Missouri to Augusta, Arkansas, and we paid that out of the next crop. So we didn't have much money.

In Arkansas, I worked on the plantation of A.L. Cole and Son. Their headquarters was at Wyattville, between Cotton Plant and Howell. Everybody always called it Cotton Plant because that was the closest town. The plantation I was on was about 12 square miles.

The population in the area was about 90% black, and all black on the plantation. Around Tyrone and Marked Tree where the union started, it must have been around 40 or 60% more Negroes than whites. The northeast part of Woodruff County was virtually all white. That's where we got a large part of our white membership from. This whole section north of McCrory, around South Bend, over as far as Martin, until you get up near Wynn, was mostly white. At one time Negroes wasn't allowed to go through these places north of McCrory unless they was a white person with them. But overall, the cotton growing area was about 75% black.

They really didn't want you to go to work off the plantation unless you got permission from them. They wanted to keep you busy, and you didn't get any money out of it. But they would say, "Now look, if you need a little grocery money come up and I'll give you a half book." When you borrowed money to make a crop, you didn't get cash money; you got a coupon book. A book looked pretty much like food stamps today. It wasn't good anywhere except at the company store.

The owner, Cole, he had a mint of his own called "brozeen." When he paid you off and credited your money, you got his money called brozeen. Now he wasn't the only one. There was a lot of plantations, large ones, like the Wilson plantation up near Blytheville and Ozone which had five plantations I think. Now each plantation had a different brozeen, but you could spend Wilson brozeen only at a Wilson store. The coupon books stayed for a long time, but the brozeen disappeared, and I'm not sure whether it was helpful or not. When brozeen disappeared there still wasn't any money; they went totally to the coupon book.

The plantation I lived on didn't have it, but a lot of the large plantations like Wilson and others had their own penal farm. They even held their own courts on certain plantations. Many times the agent on the place where I worked went to trial for me. I didn't go; he was my representative. It was the owner's own court. They had a judge, a legal justice of the peace on the plantation. The plantation was actually like a state. It had its own government, and the plantation owner actually appointed the justice of the peace. Now back in those days Negroes didn't vote too much, and the justice of the peace was elected by very few people. If the plantation owner went to all agents and all the white people who lived on the place and said, "Look, Mr. So and So is running for justice of the peace, vote for him," he got the votes. So he was a legal justice of the peace. Many plantations were broke up into units, often miles apart. So, no matter what unit he was on, the justice of the peace had jurisdiction over whatever his court area was.

EAST: Times were so bad that people over at one of those small towns over there stopped a bread truck. They stopped the bread truck and took the bread off the damn thing, a bunch of these damn working people out there. Couldn't get nothing to eat. And that happened over quite a bit of the country.

Photos credited to Workers in Our Field were taken from the 25th Anniversary book of the National Agricultural Workers Union. Courtesy of Clay East.

Back in that country, they only ate rabbits in the wintertime, see, after frost had fallen and so forth. But they used to make a remark back then that Hoover was the guy that made rabbits good to eat the year 'round. But the thing was serious.

There was a world of credit done at that time; everything was done on credit. The small farmers back at that time all had to borrow money every year to make a profit. So, if they had a bad crop year, a lot of them, that's the way they lost their farms. The bad times back there was 1920 and you just can't imagine the number of people then that was big men the year before who had lost everything they had.

They had no control whatever over what their cotton sold for. They were paid what the cotton buyer wanted to pay them. The supply and demand deal didn't work out so much. In a way, it did, but if they had a big supply and the demand for cotton went down, then the price of cotton went down. I've seen cotton sell for 4 cents a pound.

Well naturally this country was made up of those small farms to begin with—people who had come in there and bought small farms for themselves. Ritter and Emrich furnished a world of people. They had the largest store there [Tyronza] by far and had the gin and everything. Well, when a man went broke and lost his farm, they got it. So first thing you know, there's a few people who was getting ahold of all the land. See, it got to where these farms, most of them, was belonging to big businessmen, the small farmers practically all lost their farms.

I don't know what would happen to them, maybe they'd start out and try to go in and buy another small farm someplace. But not very many of those guys that actually owned those farms ever started in sharecropping. Sharecropping was generally taken up by guys that started out working as hands, see, by the month. Maybe just working by the day, mixing their jobs up.

About the acreage reduction program, all of that was very much in favor of the man that owned the land, the producer—it didn't make a damn whether he did any work or not. The government contract also stated that the way this was divided up should be decided between the producer and the tenants. And the check went to the producer, so he's sitting now with the check in his hand. Well, he can say, "You guys didn't have to pick this cotton. All you did was to plow it up, so you're not entitled to half of it." And a lot of them never did get anything. Well, since I was what in that section they called the law—that was a fair description of my position in there, because I was the only officer in that section—these people would come to me.

They'd come to me and tell me their troubles.

the Elaine Massacre ...

The following description of the Elaine story is a composite of information gathered from an account in *Crisis*, December 1919, by far the best account written; from a report entitled, "Lynching and Debt Slavery," written by NAACP Field Secretary William Pickens and published by the American Civil Liberties Union; and from my own travels through eastern Arkansas, from Marianna to Elaine, talking to individuals who would briefly recount their memories and then send me down the road a piece to a more knowledgeable source. I talked with almost a dozen folk that way, and ended up in Elaine interviewing its oldest citizen, who everyone said (and so he claimed) knew the story better than any man living. But senility prevented the story from getting out.

Elaine, Arkansas, one of those small towns built upside the railroad, is located in Phillips County, which is bordered by the Mississippi River to the east. In 1910, 78.6% of the population of Phillips County was black. There were 3,598 black tenants and sharecroppers who farmed 81,000 acres, and only 587 black farm owners in that year. An area of rich alluvial soil, two-thirds of the agricultural production of the county was in cotton, which became a booming business during the war years when cotton prices quadrupled, up from 11 cents a pound in 1915 to 40 cents a pound in 1919.

The black croppers were getting only 15 cents a pound for their cotton from the planters, less than half the going price. Many of them received no settlement from the planters for their cotton taken in the fall of 1918 until July, 1919, and never received a monthly statement of account which would have enabled them to verify charges to their accounts. These conditions prompted 68 blacks from the Fairthy plantation to hire a lawyer to sue their landlords for statements of their accounts and a just settlement. Some had planned further to go before the federal grand jury to charge certain planters (owners, managers and agents) with peonage. They hired a white attorney from Little Rock named Bratton, the same Bratton who a few years earlier had prosecuted black peonage cases in Phillips County for the government and had con-

victed a half dozen planters. (The Phillips County suit had followed a government inquiry into alleged peonage of Italian laborers in the South.) Bratton's fee was \$50 per tenant, plus a percentage of the money to be collected from the landlords. The black tenants held secret meetings to collect the money for Bratton's advance and the treasury as well as to gather evidence and facts to solidify their legal case.

According to the *Crisis* account, at the same time another organization, a union of black cotton pickers, arose whose purpose was to organize a strike for higher wages. They did strike, refusing to pick cotton until they got better pay. A substantial number of the cotton pickers were the wives and daughters of sawmill hands, whose relatively fair pay enabled them to bargain over wages. (There is simply not enough information to determine whether these organizational efforts were absolutely independent, though it seems unlikely.)

Because of the tense racial climate in the country at the time—there had been recent race riots in East St. Louis, one in Chicago and another in Washington, D.C., and an increase in KKK activity—black folks in the area had begun amassing weapons and ammunition for defense. It is unclear whether the sharecropper groups initiated and organized this activity or whether it merely became one of their main programs. It is probable, however, that organization was involved, organization that included black professionals in Helena, who several interviewees said obtained the weapons. They also recalled that a conflict was anticipated. One reported that black folks had a whole boxcar of ammunition. Another said they had machine guns and high powered rifles. The interesting, and unresolved, aspect of their organization is the possible role of Garveyites. One informant who proudly defined himself as a "race man," recalled that a Garvey local had tried to get off the ground in the Helena area without much success. Another said he suspected that Dr. A. E. Johnston, a prominent dentist and property owner of Helena and one of the four Johnston brothers lynched during the riot, was a Garveyite. Carrie Dilworth from central Arkansas, said that in her youth she



had chanted the slang expression, "Don't be no fool with Marcus Garvey," which she said meant that he would get you killed and which she understood to refer to the Elaine massacre. Stith knew the same expression. The old man in Elaine claimed that a man from Winchester, Arkansas, was responsible for organizing the sharecroppers and promised them they would win 40 cents a pound for their cotton. Others I interviewed knew of no Garvey activity in the area.

The white people in the area learned of these organizing efforts and of the gun buying which came from white Helena merchants and express offices, and began meeting to figure out how to "break up the whole business and put the Negroes in their place."

The first incident that preceded the main confrontation in Elaine, mentioned only in the *Crisis* account, involved a drunken white man from Helena named John Clem, who terrorized the black community of Elaine one Sunday by shooting up their area. Suspicious that he was sent to spark a riot, black folk kept off the streets and notified the sheriff at Helena, who did nothing; John Clem continued his gunplay the following day. The second incident occurred on Tuesday at a church near Hoop Spur just north of Elaine, where the croppers were meeting. The *Crisis* article reports several versions of the event. The first version says that the deputy sheriff, a "special agent" and a black trustee drove up to the church in a car and tried to enter the church "to investigate" the meeting and were refused admittance. Trying to force their way in, they fired into the building whereupon the blacks within fired back, killing the special agent and wounding the deputy. The second version comes from the words of the trustee (whose presence is mentioned in no other account) who said that the deputy and the special agent were ambushed by two other whites and a black. The initial statements of the wounded deputy corroborated that story. This version, however, was carefully made "inoperative" a few days thereafter. The third version, the official white version, became: blacks in the church were armed and fired on the two whites without provocation when their car had happened to break down in front of the church.

The memories of those interviewed were that the blacks had guns in the church for protection and that they had been forbidden to meet.

In essence, a "nigger hunt" ensued. Whites sent their families to Helena for safety while car and truck loads of white men—headhunters—poured in from neighboring counties in Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas. Woods were scoured. Homes were fired into. Hunting parties often tra-

velled faster than the news, catching many blacks ignorant and defenseless. The four Johnston brothers of Helena were intercepted upon return from a squirrel hunt and were lynched. The next day, in Ratio, 12 miles south of Hoop Spur, the son of Attorney Bratton was meeting with representatives of the Fairthy 68, who were anxious to go to court, to collect the fees. They were encountered by one of the white roving bands, arrested, sent to jail in Helena, and charged with murder. Bratton was nearly lynched; Governor Brough swore in special guards to protect him and surround the jailhouse, where he was held for 31 days without bond and eventually was released without trial. Those interviewed spoke of a pitched battle. Governor Brough sent in state troopers as well as 500 federal troops from Camp Pike. One businessman told me he understood that the only way they got the blacks to surrender was by sending in black troops; the croppers wouldn't shoot their brothers.

Over one thousand black men and women were arrested by the soldiers and confined in unsanitary "stockades" and denied any contact with attorneys or friends. Another 200-300 were arrested and jailed in Helena. Each was personally investigated by army officers and the select "committee of seven," comprised of two planters, a cotton factor, a merchant, a banker, the county sheriff and the mayor of Helena, which functioned with Governor Brough's sanction. "Innocent" blacks were let go only after a white appeared to vouch personally for them, which was done only after a given wage was agreed to. That settled the strike. Black farm owners who had no whites to vouch for them stayed incarcerated longest and frequently lost their land as a result.

Within a month 66 had been tried and convicted. Trials averaged 5-10 minutes and it was reported that electric connections were used on the witness chair to scare the defendants.

The Little Rock trial of the twelve men facing the electric chair received the most attention. One of the people interviewed had an uncle who attended the trial who reported that the judge asked Dr. E.C. Morris, the prominent Helena minister and president of the National Baptist Convention, whether he thought the men were guilty of murder in the first degree. After asking for an explanation of the charge from the black and white attorneys, he answered no. Another explained to me that because four of the twelve were Masons, they didn't get electrocuted, for at the time all leaders had to be Masons, from a railroad engineer to county sheriff on up to the president of the U.S. It was clear that the attack on debt slavery had been squashed.

—Leah Wise



see. Tell me that Mr. So-and-so got the check and he hadn't given them anything. The way I saw it, they started out on the shares, and after this farmer had agreed to plow up this cotton, well, I figured that the sharecropper had carried out his part of the contract and I thought that he was entitled to half of it. And a good many of the farmers did; all of them didn't have trouble. Mostly the bigger ones and the crooked ones would only give them a third. As I said, a lot of them never did get anything out of it. I don't know just what the sharecropper could do. The owner is setting there with the check and the money and he can go down and cash it. This guy doesn't have to sign it or anything, he goes down and cashes it and he's got the money in his hand. That was the way the government contract read, that this tenant has to make a deal with the producer.

WILLIAMS: During the Depression I had a crop of my own. And if I had a little leisure time to get off, I'd go over there to the boss' place and pick cotton. And that was for 35 cent a hundred. I was a good cotton picker; and I picked 300 pounds in one day to get me a dollar and a nickel. I'd go out there in the early morning just so you could see a row of cotton. It was hard, but I made it. I tried to keep my own account at the commissary store. But now where the cheating came in was on this stuff you put on the cotton, fertilizer and all that kind of stuff, and in the seeds. When they sell the cotton, they wouldn't give me what the cotton was worth. They put it there and I had to pay it all. I was renting but I wasn't supposed to pay it all. But I had all that to pay. Yes, I owed them at that store everything. I gathered crops so much. And then when I'd get enough crop gathered, then I'd pay him. I had got all my groceries and that would leave me with nothing.

I usually made 40 and 45 bales, more sometimes, and I had enough money to run me through the winter, to buy new children's clothes for school and to buy groceries to last 'til the next time they start to furnish over in the spring. They didn't never give us nothing until the first of April. But I was wise. I'd buy enough of what I couldn't raise to last 'til April or May. I was raising hogs, had cows and made my own garden and put up dry food, beans and peas and all that. I done worked myself to death.

I had to fight for the little parity I got, because they didn't want to give it to nobody. I had a big family and they had to cut off more acres. They said I didn't deserve it, and if I got it, they wanted them checks what we got to pay for some farming debts. But they couldn't get it. The government wasn't giving it to us to pay debts. They was giving

it to you to live after they cut acreage. And I didn't stand for it. They didn't like me but they had to take it.

I only sharecropped a couple of years after my husband died. And I'm telling you that sharecropping didn't give me nothing. But now when he was living and we was renting, we could get along a little better. When he died I didn't have nothing but them little chillen. And they'd take everything I'd make so I didn't need to be there. They'd take all my half of it and I had to owe him on his half.

And another thing, they didn't allow no colored chillen to even go to school but seven months, and they made them stay in the field and the white kids was going to school all kind of every way. I wouldn't stick for that now. I taught school until I got so many children I couldn't get nobody to take care of them and it took all I made. But I taught before I had the three little children. And when I got the fourth one I had to quit and take care of them. You know in them days you had to know how to teach everything, from the first to the eighth grade. But I wasn't getting nothing but \$35 a month. They raised it to \$45 about a month after I quit. But I had to pay somebody to keep my babies. And them people charged me \$2, \$3 each kid a month. That's \$10. And then I had to feed them and go get them, bring them home, had to do this and do that, and when I'd get finished with all that I wouldn't have \$10. And I just quit teaching. My husband say, "Go head and quit teaching and sit down and maybe you'll get some peas and okra."

They built a cannery down by our school, and I run the cannery putting up fruits and such. It was the next thing I done, and I made more doing that than I did teaching.

BUTLER: Those were terrible days for everybody—Depression days that made for a lot of people thinking about trying for something better. More and more people got to thinking socialist, you know. Well, I had been a socialist for a long, long time. When I was about 16 years old, I began to read about Gene Dabs, you know, and began to see how things was really beginning to work, so I became somewhat of a socialist then, and I still am. I couldn't be anything else and be honest with myself.

My father was a farmer from the time before I was born. In fact, I guess he was born a farmer over in Alabama. And then he did move to Arkansas a while before I was born. Then I never was out of the state of Arkansas until after I was grown. I never went to a, what you would call a high school or anything of that kind. We had a little country school, way out some eight miles from

Pangburn where I grew up and went to school in a little one-room country school where one teacher taught everybody, and believe it or not, kids when they'd get through what they would call eighth grade, knew more than the kids that get through high school today.

MITCHELL: I have always said that my family came down the agricultural ladder. My father was a tenant farmer who owned his team and farming tools. My grandfather owned his own farm and lived near Halls, Tennessee. He was also a Baptist preacher. From the time I was eight years old I worked for wages on the farm. I worked for 50 cents per day upwards. I made my first sharecrop about 1919.

I left Halls several times, but returned and graduated from high school there. I had moved around so much that I had missed several grades, but I was permitted to make them up.

During the year 1926 we made another sharecrop, raised cotton, tomatoes and picked strawberries. We had a cash income of \$185 for our year's work. About that time my father was operating a barber shop in the town of Tyronza, and he wrote me about how rich the land was in Arkansas. He said, "If you are going to farm, come to Arkansas. This is the place. The land is rich and they raise two bales of cotton per acre." He didn't say that the boll weevils got half of it, or three-fourths of it, but that usually happened. I went over to look at a place in Arkansas. There was a plantation owner who was anxious to have me come out. He said I could work part time in the company store and that I could make a crop too. Then I went out and looked at some of those dilapidated houses. One could see daylight by looking up and could see daylight by looking down. I decided immediately that I wasn't going to live in one of those shacks. I was ready to go back to Tennessee where it was a little more civilized.

I was about ready to leave when my father told me there was a pressing shop in the back of his barber shop and the man who had been operating it had just quit. My father advised me to take it. I told him I did not know anything about operating a pressing shop but he said I could learn, and I did learn. I soon had a dry cleaning plant and a booming business. I guess I was a fairly good salesman. I bought a car which I did not know how to drive, one of those old Fords that had to be cranked up. I put a body on it and a sign, "Tyronza Cleaners." I went all over the plantations soliciting business and I got a lot of it, especially in the fall of the year when the sharecroppers had a little money. Sharecroppers were allowed whatever money the seed brought. After they ginned the

cotton they got the money from the sale of the seed to pay for the picking. They had a saying, "Get the landlord's cotton off my seed." Then they would have a little money to spend. Most of them had at least one Sunday suit and they would usually have it cleaned and pressed. I would pick up the cleaning and return it. Of course, my best customers were the plantation owners, the riders and people of that sort. I made a fairly good income up until about 1931 or '32. Then the bank failed.

Organization of the Union

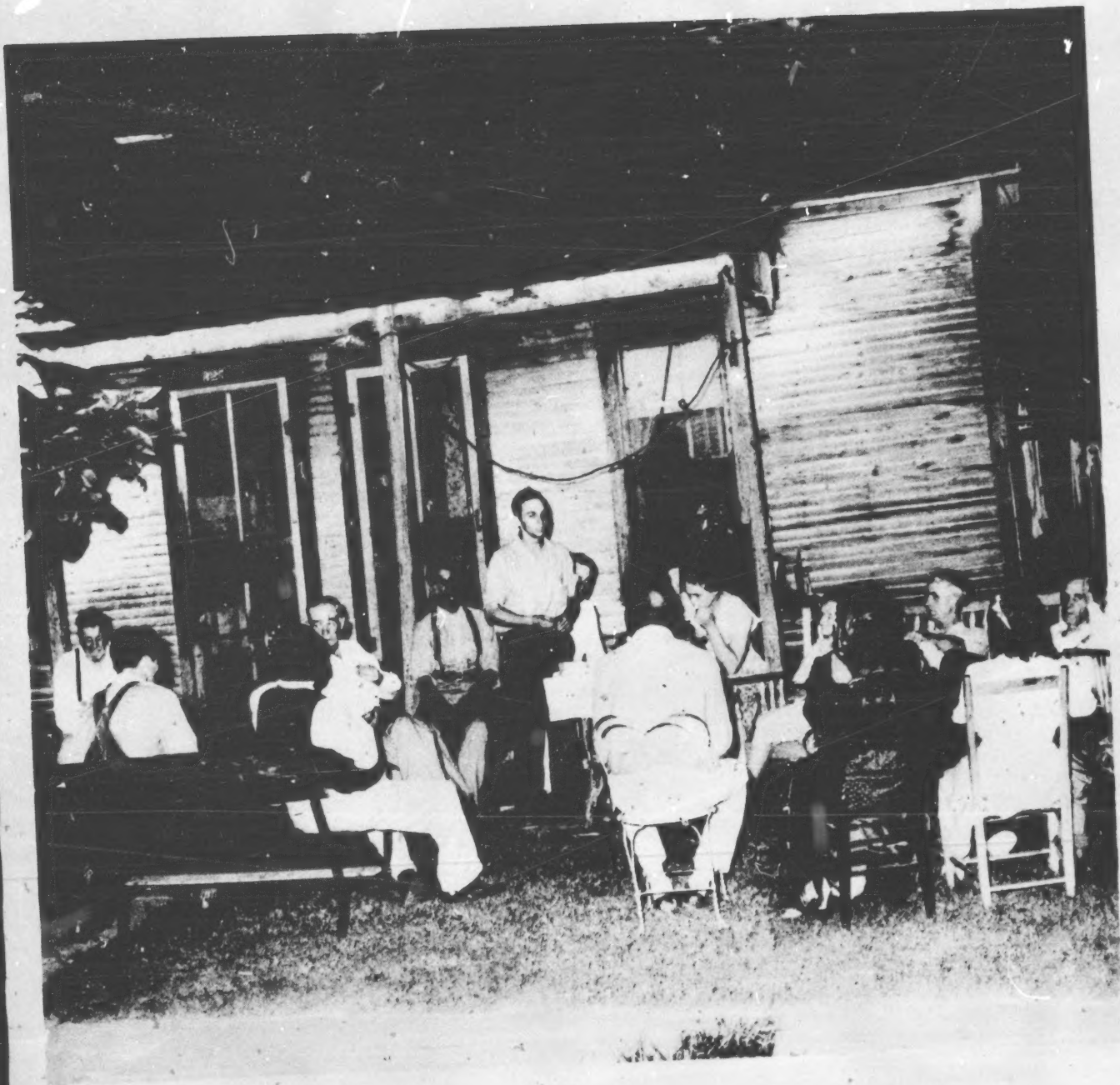
EAST: Tyronza was a little town, I'd say around 500. Just before we came back from Texas, a mule bogged down there on Main Street and they couldn't get him out and he died in there.

On Sunday everyone would meet the train and get a paper. Not much other place to go and they was always a big crowd at the depot on Sunday morning. In fact, there was generally a bunch of people that would meet the train, which ran twice a day.

The town at one time was built, all of it, right along the railroad track, facing the railroad track with a road between the buildings and the railroad track. And that's the way most towns back there were built at that time, built right up to the railroad track because all their supplies came in by rail and they wanted to be as near to that as they could, because they had to haul all that stuff by wagon. I was from an old-time Tyronza family. My dad had a nice grocery store and farmed on the side. I had a hell of a reputation as a boy. I was one of the worst in town, always into something, even when I was in school.

I couldn't say definitely, but I probably had been running a service station for a couple of years when I first knew Mitch—when he came in there and started that dry cleaning outfit. He traded with me and I looked after his cars. The last time I bought a car for him, it was a Moon; I think I paid \$125 for it in Memphis.

Mitch didn't have much to do with other people. As far as us talking about politics or anything, I never had any conversations with him at all until I got to setting around over there doing nothing and figured me out a system I thought we should be operating under and when I went over and talked to Mitchell, he said, "Why, you're a socialist." And of course, I was kind of smart-alecky and I told him, "Hell, my hair's not long enough." About the only thing I at that time knew about socialism was calling them Bolsheviks; some people said Bolsheviks and we'd see cartoons in the paper about Russians and my grandad always called them



"Roosians." But, that's about as much as I knew about them.

Mitch told me that he'd bring down a book for me to read. I told him then that if it was about socialism, he needn't bring it down to me. So, Mitch said, "You don't have to be so damn narrow minded, you can read it and if it's no good, forget about it." I guess maybe that day or the next day, he come by there and pitched me out a little paper book, *Letters to Jud* by Upton Sinclair. Well, I never had heard of Upton Sinclair, I didn't know nothing about him. And I started in reading that thing and the more I read, the more sense it made. After that, I knew there was something wrong and everyone else did too.

That was the first one that I read. Then, I was so interested in that thing that I ordered some of them—had a slip on the back where you could order them, and I ordered ten at a time. I read *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy and I read some of Sinclair's larger books.

I was a Minuteman for Oscar Ameringer and was listed in the *American Guardian* every week as one of the top Minutemen. They listed you in there by the number of new subscribers you got.

Yes, right away, after I read *Letters to Jud*. That convinced me right then that what, well, it just made sense, that's all.

See, the Socialist Party was what we started first. The only thing that I could tell you about that was Mitch, my brother, and Nunally had about 12 or 14 that went in together and got a state charter. They had the first Socialist charter issued in Arkansas. It must have been in 1931, that's what I would guess. I wasn't in on that because I was running for constable at the time they first organized the Party and got a charter and all, but as soon as the election was over, then I joined the Party and got a card, see.

At that time, we was instructed about how to hold meetings. They said to get a group together at home and discuss these things and talk them over. After we got this going, we got the Odd Fellows Hall and had regular meetings in there. And anywhere from 50, I'd say, to 100, 150 maybe, would come to the meetings. Quite often we'd have people from some other surrounding town or something, but most of them were local people. Dr. William R. Amberson from the University of Tennessee was our most active participant. He attended more meetings over there at our socialist "locals" than any one person. He was over there quite often. Mixed meetings weren't held back there until we started up with the union. So this was before the union and I just don't remember any black people being in there at all.

I'd make a lot of talks. I always made a prac-

tice of telling stories that showed a comparison between socialism and capitalism and I'd always make fun and show how stupid and silly the capitalist system was, and how much more sensible the socialist movement was. At that time, they had the WPA [Works Progress Administration], which was put out by the government, see. And we always had suggestions or criticism about the way it operated.

See, that was quite a long time before the union started, that had to be in the early part of 1932, and Thomas was campaigning. I don't know whether you know it or not, but he was travelling over the country, he and his wife was driving from city to city in an old Buick. We had this meeting at the Tyronza schoolhouse and had Thomas in there to speak. People were there from Little Rock and Hot Springs, and all over the state. See the papers was full of stuff about these socialists over in Tyronza, so we had folks coming in there from all over the country. All they could get in the schoolhouse auditorium and some standing. I'd say 500 people. We took him around the countryside to these different farms. We took him out to the Norcross plantation, and he went in there and Norcross had this barn with concrete floors and running water for his hogs. Then he goes out to these sharecropper houses and there was no screens and there was flies and holes in the floor and roof and everything. And when he got up to make this talk at the schoolhouse and told about how they was treating the animals so much better, the cows and all too, he had concrete examples.

The way I remember the union getting started—see, in the South we call twelve o'clock "dinner." When Norman Thomas was there to speak we had dinner at my home and during the meal, Norman was the first one that planted that idea in our heads. He told me at that meeting, "What you need here is a union." In other words, the Socialist Party wasn't going to be any help to these tenant farmers. This was after we had taken him out, see, and shown him the conditions in the country and all. And that is where the idea originated, when Thomas told us that. So, after he left, we talked the thing over. Mitchell was actually the big planner in this deal. There was Mitch and myself and two other guys, I think probably Ward Rogers and possibly Alvin Nunnally.

I can't remember just how many there was at the first meeting, but as I remember, it was about 50-50, about half white and half black. But there wasn't any particularly strong dissent against a mixed union. We had to have an understanding among the union members, and you couldn't have much understanding if you had two separate unions. So, we didn't have any complica-



Photo from *Workers in Our Fields*
Fairview Plantation School

tions to amount to anything about that. I got up and I was pretty hot by that time and it was, as I said, getting up pretty late and I told them we'd come down here to decide what or whether we was going to have a union or not, and if we was going to have one, well, let's make up our mind and get some members in here. So I took in the first members. They started signing some cards, we had some cards and all there and these guys joined up.

MITCHELL: We had organized the Socialist Party, too, but that was just to start with, and then as things got worse and the Depression deepened, by 1933, we had 2,000 members of the Socialist Party of Arkansas in the Tyronza area. I became the Secretary of the Socialist Party of Arkansas in 1933. We got Norman Thomas to come down in the early part of '34. This was after Hiram Norcross, the planter, went out and measured all the land he had and evicted 40 families after they had started planting the crop. He didn't like the idea at all, having to pay the sharecroppers half of the government plow-up money. He was arguing that they should just get a third, because they did not have anything invested except their labor. They plowed under every third row of cotton. The next year they agreed to reduce the cotton by 40%. After we organized, we filed a suit against Norcross on the basis of his evicting those 40 odd families and enforcing the rights of the sharecroppers under the AAA contract.

BUTLER: I got this letter from Mitchell and they told me that they were going to have a state socialist convention at Tyronza, and invited me over, and I went. While at that convention, I saw things happening to the people that lived around there that shouldn't have happened to a dog, Clay

East, Mitchell, myself and some others decided that a union was about the best thing that could be thought up.

After I had gone back to my sawmill job, I got a call from Mitchell, and he told me that they were ready to start building a union there. In fact, I think they had already had a meeting at which they, well, sort of got together on some ideas. So I went back over again, and we worked out a constitution and started organizing. It wasn't long before we had an organizer or two in jail because the plantation element in that part of the country absolutely did not want them "niggers" organized, and they didn't hesitate to say it in just those words. The whites were niggers, too. There was no difference, and some of 'em was beginning to see that there was no difference. Of course, there was still a lot of prejudice among white people in those days, but hard times makes peculiar bedfellows sometimes, and so some of them were beginning to get their eyes open and see that all of them were being used. So it was easy to get a start on organizing.

None of us who were really interested in getting the work started would agree to having a separate union or separate meetings or anything of that kind. A lot of the Negro people agreed with us because they knew that if they had a meeting with just black people there, they wouldn't have any protection whatever, but a few white people might have protective influence, so it was to their interest really to have all of it together.

We never did have any particular difficulty because of the integrated meetings. We'd have threats, but nobody ever tried to break up a meeting just for that lesson. I think our effort at organizing was actually the beginning of the civil rights movement. Thinking of the thing in an overall picture, you know, I believe that we started something that over the years has been very productive of good results.

Of course we had opposition on every hand, the law enforcement officers and the plantation owners and a lot, even, of the white sharecroppers themselves were opposed to an organization that took in both races. But we overcame all of that to some extent and we were ready. People knew that it just had to happen. They all knew that they were in the same boat and that they all had to pull together. That's about the best way that I know to express it. As soon as we began to tell them what the situation was and what might be done about it, well, they could see that the white people were being treated just the same as the Negroes, and so there was no great opposition at all to integrated meetings.

The first two years, I never drew one penny of

salary and but very little expense money. I would go over to Memphis—at first over to Tyronza—and do whatever I could, you know, and then go back to my sawmill job. I was still doing some sawmill work. The mill belonged to my brother. There was no market for lumber to amount to anything. He had a few hands that worked for him all the time and he paid us 50 cents a day for our work and he traded lumber for fat hogs or a cow, or a mule, anything. And if it was eatable, why it was killed and eaten.

Early Days of the Union

MITCHELL: Evictions occurred continuously. We estimate something like a half a million or a million as a result of the cotton plow-up program. The same findings were made by Dr. Calvin Hoover who was doing a survey with Howard Odum, I believe. Their estimates were a little higher than ours. I think his were 900,000 evicted as a result of the cotton plow-up in 1933 and the reduction in the cotton program in 1934.

In the beginning, if a union family was evicted and the family wanted to, we'd put them back in the houses. This was done now and then. Usually the plantation owner didn't want them and most of them didn't want to stay. We did that continuously in 1935 because there just wasn't any place for them to go and many people had come back from the city. There wasn't the relation between the farms and the cities as close as it is today.

They'd go to Chicago, stop first in Memphis, or St. Louis, and then wind up in the Chicago or Detroit area. Many of them, both black and white, went to Detroit after jobs opened in the auto plants.

In the beginning, we were trying to get a section of the law enforced providing that sharecroppers should not be evicted from the land because of the operation of this AAA program. We were trying to get that enforced, but of course, they didn't pay any attention to the law, any more than they do now when poor people are concerned. We filed a lawsuit in the courts, and about the time the lawsuit was being thrown out, we sent a delegation to Washington to see the Secretary of Agriculture, Mr. Henry Wallace, the great liberal. As we



H. L. Mitchell

Photo by Bob Dinwiddie

always did, we had representation of both whites and blacks; there were two other whites beside me and two blacks, McKinney and another minister, Rev. N.W. Webb, a union organizer from Birdsong, Arkansas.

We got up early in the morning. Because of the inter-racial composition of our group, we drove day and night as there was no place for us to stop and we didn't know what else to do. I had never been to Washington but once. We arrived in Washington early in the morning and pulled up on the side of a street and went to sleep in the car, as we'd done on the way up. I think I drove all the way because nobody else could drive. At 7 a.m. we had a little breakfast somewhere after finding a store that was open. We bought cheese and crackers, bread, baloney, cold drinks, etc. At 7:30 we walked over to the Department of Agriculture. There was no one there but an unarmed guard who told us the Department of Agriculture farmers didn't get there till about 9 o'clock. So we went to see the Washington Monument and that was even closed.

Soon after 9 o'clock we went back to the Department of Agriculture. We marched up the stairs, the guard had told us the Secretary's office was 204. We went right into the Secretary's office, and the receptionist asked who we were and we told her we were a delegation from the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and we wanted to see the Secretary. She asked if we had an appointment. Of course we did not. I never heard of having to make an appointment to "see" anybody before. I hesitated and didn't know what to say. McKinney stepped up and said, "Ma'am, we will just sit down here. If Mr. Wallace is busy, we'll just wait until he gets through and we can talk to him then. The receptionist didn't know what to do with a group of people who intended to sit in the office and wait for Mr. Wallace. About that time I remembered a letter I had addressed to Paul Appleby, the Undersecretary of Agriculture, and I asked her if she would deliver the letter to Mr. Appleby. Paul Appleby came out and soon he got Henry Wallace out there to see us.

Wallace promised to send an investigator down to investigate the displacement of people under the AAA. We evidently put up a rather convincing story to him. Wallace told us he had the right person for the job. She was a lawyer, Mrs. Mary Conner Meyers, who had just finished working on a case for the Treasury Department. It was Capone's income tax evasion case in Chicago. This led to the imprisonment of that racketeer. Wallace said he would see that Mrs. Meyers was sent down to Arkansas. He told us to go back and tell our members we had seen the Secretary of Agriculture and that something was going to be done,

but not to say what or who will do it.

STITH: When I heard about the union I lived at a little place called Cotton Plant in Woodruff County. The way I heard about the union was through a friend of mine who was older. We used to run around since neither of us was married. He said to me one night, "Come to the union meeting with me," and I said, "What kind of meeting?" And he said, "A farm tenant union." I said, "What is it good for?" He said, "It's good to make times better for us."

This must have been in 1935. I got in early enough to get in on the strike. Anyway, I says, "Okay, I'll go with you." He said, "It'll cost you a dime to get in." And I said, "I don't have a dime." He said, "I got a dime." So I went to the meeting with him and he paid the dime. That made me a member.

The meeting was at a private home on the plantation that I worked on. However, there were three plantations in that one union local and we rotated. Sometimes we'd be on the plantation I was on. Then they would decide it was best to move to one of the other plantations because the land owners didn't want the union. We were a little bit afraid because they had been beating up and killing a few to try to break the union. So we were afraid to meet at one place too long. We would rotate our meetings, and we had outside guards with shotguns.

I guess there were about 50 people at that first meeting. At one time that union local had a hundred and forty or fifty members, and there were many locals that were larger than that. This one was a combination of three plantations. About 95% of the families on the plantation joined the union.

And that very night my friend got up a motion that I would be made secretary of the union local. I couldn't write much better than he could, I don't think. He was secretary but he wanted to give it up because he didn't think he could write good enough. None of the others could write too well, not so far as writing letters and communications. They could write their name and put down some figures. But when it come down to writing or communicating in a business manner, they didn't. And I hadn't never either, but for some reason I was just able to do it. Actually, my job was really only to keep minutes, read communications and to record and hand down whatever decisions was made by the local. When the local was called on for meetings in Memphis, I usually went. They usually tried to send the person who was thought could get the best understanding and bring it back. Sometimes that would be the local president and/or the



Photo from Workers in Our Fields

George Stith

secretary. Where they figured the secretary couldn't quite do the job, it might be the vice-president. Of course, in the local I was in, it would always be me that was the one. I guess that give me a lot of courage. They thought I could do it so I always tried. I remained secretary until I moved to Gould in 1947.

I believe the president of our local at the time I joined was Will Curry. Although our local was all black, it had been organized by a white fellow—I can't think of his name—along with a colored man by the name of Farrish Betton from south of Cotton Plant. Betton was later made vice president of the organization. The two together organized the local. Betton wasn't a sharecropper. He was what was known as a tenant. He rented. He lived in this community I call Dark Corner; it's in Monroe County. And he was a justice of the peace in that community. That wasn't an all black community either. It was about 70% black. The white man who was justice of the peace had died. Before his death he requested from the quorum court that they make Betton justice of the peace because he was the only other qualified person in the area then. He had a high school education which was at that time good. And he stayed justice of the peace until he left there. Of course, he had some trouble—out of both races, in fact. And he had all kinds of threats, even after he got in the union; not for being justice of the peace, but because he was in the union. He was told to get out. I remember him telling me that from time to time some of the white people—and I use the word because he used it—would come to him and tell him, "Look, Betton, you're justice of the peace and you're too good a man to be mixed up with these low class people. So the best thing for you to do is just get out of it."

They tried to separate people by class, and they tried to do it by race. Which ever was best to use, they used it. It worked on a lot of people, and some people it just didn't work on. For instance, the agent on the plantation where I lived wanted to join the union because he knew the problem, but he was

afraid to. And he says to me, "Now George, look, I know you. Anything y'all need that I can give you, just tell me. Information or anything else, I'd get it."

Our local had all kinds of committees for whatever we thought was necessary. We had program committees, we had committees to make decisions on strikes. When we elected the first strike committee, it was made standing. Anytime we decided on a strike, this committee was consulted and told what the problem was. Strikes were talked about all the time, all the time. Strikes was actually voted on by a local at the STFU headquarters in Memphis. The union would call in the locals. They would say to the locals, this is what we have in mind. The secretary would tell the local to decide whether it was a good thing. Then they would send their representatives over to Memphis. Somehow we got them there, a lot of times I don't know how. But when we got to Memphis, a decision was made. Because legal procedures and very little of the law was on our side, a strike was always decided in Memphis. It were talked about by the executive committee, which usually involved a person from almost every area, at least from every state. Where unions was heavy, we had it broke up into areas or districts. For instance, this area local was in Pine Bluff, and the executive committee would decide which would be best. They would report their decisions back to the locals. Sometimes the idea for a strike would come from the local. The local would write in and say, well this is what is happening here; we believe if we could have a strike, it might could do some good. The executive branch of the union would look into it. If they thought it feasible, they'd say go ahead and have a "local." This was known as a local strike. But most of the time we tried to do it on a larger basis because it was more effective. Plantations used one against the other. For instance, if we struck on this plantation and the other two around didn't strike, they would be used against us. The owners would say, "Look, such and such a thing is happening over here, go over and help him out."

Racial makeup of a local depended a lot upon the area where you organized. Agriculture labor, especially in the cotton fields, at that time was about 85 or 90% black so your membership normally ran just like your area. In Arkansas in the early days of the union, I think our white support was an over-average percentage compared to their population at large. Our white membership at one time ran higher than 15% whites, much higher, especially in certain areas. And it increased as the union spread into other states. In parts of Alabama there was nothing but whites.

It was a community thing. Naturally the communities were segregated. That's why we had seg-

regated locals, because whites and blacks usually didn't live on the farm together.

There were locals that were integrated though. When we first started there was no integrated local. Even though white and black organized together, it was set up on the basis of race. Let me tell you this. When I went to Louisiana in 1953 down in the sugar cane fields, we had the same situation there. Certain plantations were all black and certain plantations were all white. The first time I went to a place called Raceland to make a talk to a group of sugar cane workers, I was the first Negro, except the janitor, that had his foot in the American Legion Hall. The workers were all white, and I went in there that night, and they looked at me sort of funny and said, "Is this who gon' talk?"

Later when we had our district meeting to bring our locals from the whole sugar cane area together, you had the whites and the blacks. And when they sat down and talked and thought of the situation, they decided we were all in the same boat. So they said, "Well, when are y'all gonna meet, we want to come over. When we're gonna meet, we want y'all to come over." Now this was a thing that just happened. I mean segregation run out so far as the union was concerned. They couldn't see segregation.

No. The whites had problems as well as we did. Usually we held it in a church or a country schoolhouse. A lot of time they were held without authority, but we could always get in. But the whites had a problem. Where they belonged to a church, the higher ups also belonged, and they couldn't get the church to have a meeting. So they had to come to a Negro place in order to have a meeting place.

Repression

In 1935, Normas Thomas again came to Arkansas and attempted to speak in the community of Birdsong. The meeting was broken up by a crowd of angry planters and lawmen, and Thomas was assured that no "gawd-damn yankee bastard" was welcome in Arkansas. Union organizer, Ward Rogers, had been arrested earlier when he threatened "to lead a group that would lynch every planter in Poinsett County." In the "reign of terror" that followed, union meetings were banned and union members were arrested on the slightest pretext. The union moved its headquarters to Memphis, and its officers depended on dark nights, fast cars, and back roads to get them in and out of the state safely. Acting under pressure, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration sent an attorney, Mary Conner Myers, into the state to investigate the massive evictions and wave of

repression. Mrs. Myers was considered an "impartial" observer, but the report that she subsequently wrote for the department was considered too controversial to be released.

STITH: After what happened at Tyronza where they beat up a few and maybe killed some of them, we decided on a local basis that we had to put up some kind of defense if we were going to meet. We were not just going to let people come in. And this is what I heard a lot of: "We're not gonna let them do us like they did in Elaine, just come and kill us out. So we gon' be prepared." I didn't know too much about the Elaine riot, though my father was there. But we never had cause to use our guns.

I think most of the whites and some of the blacks did decide not to have guns, but around Cotton Plant area, we didn't see it. Where the plantations was larger and more controlled, you had more trouble. The smaller plantations—I lived on a smaller plantation—we didn't have as much trouble, yet they resented organizing and they put out threats. But they didn't have as much Ku Klux kind of power in that area as in some other areas.

MITCHELL: We had a system of guards, inner guards and outer guards. We didn't call it a defense committee, but they were provided to warn the members in the meeting if any trouble was about to start. The guards were not armed. We did one other thing because of this Elaine catastrophe as we knew that the colored people would be slaughtered as well as people like Clay East and me. We decided that under no circumstances would the union retaliate, no matter what happened. We would try to influence public opinion and attempt to get the public on our side. If we had fought back it would have been our Negro members who suffered most. We were sure of that fact and we didn't want another Elaine Massacre.

In the records of the union there is a set of instructions we sent to members of the union about attending union meetings. We advised them not to go in groups of more than two or three at a time. They were to go quietly to the meeting place and to have their outer guards and inner guards watching. If the planters came, the guards were to notify the members to disperse. If they wanted to sing, that was all right, but they should keep their voices low. We had this all worked out.

We had friends, national and regional. First of all, of course, was Norman Thomas, who had access to radio and newspapers. In Memphis we had a friend at the University of Tennessee Medical College, a rather famous physiologist, Dr. William R. Amberson. Dr. Amberson was a man of great standing and he had access to the local newspaper.

In addition there was also a Socialist local in Memphis so we were not entirely without contacts. And, of course, the entire Socialist and labor union press were aware of our movement down in Arkansas.

DILWORTH: I'll tell you the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union had a secret society. When we first opened up to try to build an organization, you'd have to go to different towns and different places. We would have signs when we'd get off the bus or off the train or out of the car, so you could get to see if there was any members there. Just rub your right hand across your face this away (gestures, rubbing back of right hand across forehead from left to right). We also had something you had to say to get into the union hall.

EAST: We went over in a different section to a Negro church and Butler was there and Mitch was there and myself and possibly another speaker or so, I don't know. We had a good turnout, possibly 100-150 tenant people in there. And just before we

got the meeting started, here come one of the big planters from over there, Mr. Sloan.

He came in with a couple of big deputies, see, with their pistols buckled on them and he just came marching in there. He wanted to see what was going on. Well, you don't know how a lot of those colored people felt back there when the boss man comes in and sees them at a union meeting. They was a little bit shaky, but I'll say this, that the colored guys back there, if anything, were more solid than the whites. They'd go ahead and sacrifice and get killed or beat up or anything else before they'd give up.

I had a big six-shooter on and a pretty bad reputation if I do say it, not a bad reputation, but they knew that I wouldn't do to fool with. So, I got up and told them that "If you folks are going to be scared because your boss has walked in here and so forth, just quieten down, now this thing is perfectly legal. We've got corporation papers and we got our constitution." Well, he wanted a copy of this, Mr. Sloan did. So Mitch says, "Well, if you've got ten cents, you can have one." So he sold him a



Photo from Workers in our Fields

Norman Thomas Speaking in the Arkansas Delta, 1935

copy of the constitution. And then Mitch proceeded to tell him, "Well, you folks are not eligible for membership in this, so we'll ask you to leave." And I have often wondered what he would have done if Sloan had refused. But at the time, he got up and walked out. He and his men went trudging out of there with his six-shooters and all, see.

We got a raft of members signed up at that meeting. You didn't need much. Those folks were in a bind and they was being mistreated and when you got up and pointed these things out to them, why you didn't have much trouble signing them up. Practically all the people that came to meetings signed up.

Crittenden County was an outlaw outfit, I'm telling you, the law was. Howard Curlin was the sheriff and they had the roughest, toughest bunch of gangster officers that they could collect. They didn't pay any attention to the government or anyone. I've been in their jail and seen this big leather strap; they didn't try to hide it or anything. And you couldn't get a reporter or a lawyer out of Memphis to go into Marion. They wouldn't take a case of any kind. You couldn't get them to go in there. They'd say, "Naw, we won't go in there, not to Crittenden County." And Mary Conner Myers was sent down there from Washington; Roosevelt sent her down there. That was the report they would never publicize because it was so hot. She helped break up the Capone Gang in Chicago and all, so she knew what rough stuff was, and she said that Capone and all them boys was sissies beside this bunch down in Arkansas. And that's the report she come out and made in Memphis, see, after she'd been over there. But the full report was never published. They never made it public after she went back to Washington.



Photo by Sue Thrasher

Clay East, 1973

BUTLER: Not too long after we began organizing, one of our Negro organizers got thrown in jail in Marion, so a bunch of us went down to get him out. We knew that if there wasn't something drastic done that he would just be kept in there for however long. So we gathered up a bunch of white people, white members of the union, and we got a big truck and took a load of 15 or 20 white people. All of them were cripples, they all had to have some kind of support, a walking stick of some kind. I think most of them felt like a stick of some kind might help them out. They might have to have some sort of protection. People were scared in those days, people had always been controlled by the plantation owners and their henchmen, the sheriffs and the deputies and all that, and people were afraid of the law because those laws would beat a man up. They could throw him in jail and keep him as long as they wanted to. A man didn't have a chance to fight if he wasn't a plantation owner. They could charge him with anything and he was guilty.

So we drove up on the courthouse yard and they began to pile out of the truck, and Mitchell was along. I was there. Ward Rogers was there too. And here came the sheriff or the deputy perhaps to meet us with his hands back of him. "Now Ward, we don't want any trouble here. I'm gonna bring that fellow down and turn him over to you. We're gonna turn him loose." He brought the man down from the jail and turned him over to us and we went on back home, and we didn't even have to ask him could you do it, when he saw that crowd get out, you know.

One time Powers Hapgood, who later on became the state director of the CIO for Indiana, came down and spent a while with us in the early days of the union. And he and I one day went over into Arkansas to see this man Stultz. We were not bothered on the way in; we parked outside on the roadway and went through a gate on down to the sharecropper cabins where Stultz was living. We talked with him and when we started back out, here came the riding boss, or whatever his title might have been, along with four or five others, and they attempted to cut Hapgood and I off from getting out, but we beat them to the gate and headed for our car. They passed by where a bunch of scrap lumber was and they all grabbed pieces of scrap lumber and took out after us. Well, Hapgood had locked the doors of the car—I hadn't thought to tell him not to do it, but he had—so he was working as fast as he could and he got the door open and I got in and we had a big .38 special pistol



Dorothea Lange/FSA

J. R. Butler, President, Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, Memphis, Tennessee, 1938

in the glove compartment. So, as soon as he got the door where I could get it open, I was in there and had that gun. So, that car had a running board, you probably have seen cars with running boards, so I stood on the running board with one hand on the inside of the car and held the gun in the other hand. I told Powers, "Get the hell out of here, before I have to kill one of them." So, as quick as he could start the car, we left. By the time he got ready to roll, they were as close to us as the door there. And they would have beat us up; I don't know if they would have killed us, probably wouldn't. But they would have beaten us up if they had caught us.

I carried a gun most of the time. Of course, if I had ever had to use it, why, I'd have been in trouble. But I would have used it if I had to. There was a lot of violence against union members. Any number of union people were visited at night by sometimes one maybe, sometimes half a dozen, and maybe their houses shot at, anything they thought would discourage them and get them out of the union. But I don't believe the Klan, actually as a Klan, was ever any—sometimes I want words, and can't think of the words I want—I don't think the Klan gave us as much trouble as just individuals.

There was one thing that I thought about telling you, a little incident that occurred during the time of the union. Over at Earle, Arkansas, there was a plantation man that was also a deputy sheriff and he needed some work done on his farm, so he got around and arrested, I believe, 11 members of the union and threw 'em in jail. When they had their trial the judge turned them over to him then to work out their fines, and he put them out on his plantation under guard, and had them working out there. We found out about it and we got some pictures by a man crawling around through cotton rows and making pictures and so on. Well, we brought charges against them in the Department of Justice.

The Department of Justice sent two lawyers down to Memphis to check. Well, old Peacher had got scared enough that he'd turned all these people loose. When these Department of Justice investigators came down there, they said, "Now we will not go into Arkansas to make any investigation, but if you can get some of those people and bring 'em here to Memphis, we'll question 'em." So I went to Earle, and ran across one or two of the fellows that had been enslaved. They gathered up others, and they had about seven of them around my car, telling me about what had been done and how and



Photo by Sue Thrasher

J. R. Butler, Phoenix, Arizona, 1973

all that, and here came a deputy sheriff. His name was Graham, he rammed his car up close to mine, jumped out, grabbed a .38 out of his holster, slammed it down across the door into my ribs, and said, "What the goddamned hell are you doing over here?" Well, I knew I had to tell him something, so I said, "Well, I'm over here getting the evidence that's gonna send you and Paul Peacher and a few more of you to the penitentiary for the rest of your lives." I said, "The FBI knows exactly where I am. They know exactly what I'm doing, and they know exactly when to expect me back in Memphis, and if I'm not there, they're gonna find out why." He jerked the gun down, slammed it back in his holster, and said, "All right." He got back in his car and pulled out.

Well, when that happened, all of the fellows that had been around talking with me just disappeared except for three, and those three stayed with me and were still talking, and we saw a car go down the road towards Memphis that was loaded with about a half a dozen men with rifles and so on. One of these guys said, "They're going down to waylay us." Then I said, "Now, do you know of a way that we can go that will take us back to highway 70?" One of 'em said, "Yes, I know. We'll have to go through one man's wash lot." I said, "That don't make any difference, let's get down to highway 70." So we went to highway 70 so we could go into Memphis on a different road, you know, instead of on highway 64. I told the fellow, "Now, get down in back and stay quiet because we're going in. If somebody gets in our way, we're still going in." I had that big old Hudson that I'd bought. Well, I opened it up and we went. We expected—I expected really—that they would try to block me at West Memphis, but they didn't. I think some of them might have been parked around there, but they didn't try to block the highway. So I went on through and I got the men over there and the Department of Justice men asked them enough questions to get enough for an indictment and we got Paul Peacher indicted and convicted of peonage.

EAST: There was this guy from the Workers Alliance, Dave Benson, and a bunch of colored folks that had been put in jail over at Forrest City. That was in Cross County, see. They had been put in jail for inciting to riot, and this boy, Benson, was in for no driver's license. They had a bunch of trumped up charges against him. We couldn't get a lawyer in Memphis to take the case and I went and got this lawyer from Little Rock. I had a fast automobile, a '35 Tereplane, and I still wasn't scared to go into Arkansas. When a union man

went into Arkansas, he was taking a good chance of getting killed or at least beat up.

I don't remember the lawyer's name, but his father was one of the attorneys that defended the Scottsboro boys.

When we got to Forrest City, he went into the courthouse and the men came up for trial. It was so tense. I was setting in the back of the courtroom myself and an old colored guy passed by and there was this old cripple man setting there with a damn walking cane and he hit at him just as hard as he could. That thing was so tense you could just feel it in the air. I knew it was bad.

This guy from the Workers Alliance told the lawyer, "Don't do a damn thing for me; this thing is too bad." He had been in jail there for several days, and he realized what the situation was.

Well, when this attorney left the courthouse, there was a damn mob following him—a bunch in a group, see. And they followed him down to my car. I started down there, and this guy took off and the mob turned on me. The lawyer went down to a cafe to get something to eat and the boys went and took him out of that damn cafe and I understand beat him up and put him on a bus and told him, "Don't you ever come back into Forrest City, or we'll kill you."

Well, this man Bunch, he led this mob on me, telling them all I had done. He had that mob ready. Well, they was backing me up, they was on me and they was hollering, "Kill the son of a bitch," and all this kind of stuff. I backed into a kind of ditch and fell on my back, and when I fell, I had my head up against a hedge and these guys was trying to get ahold of me. I was just laying on my hips and I'd wheel and kick one and every time one would get close to me, I'd kick the hell out of him. And some big guy—never did know who he was—got right straddle of me and told these guys, said, "Get the hell off of him. Leave him alone." Well, I got up and they was hollering, "Kill him!" and all that kind of damn stuff and I told them, "Now listen. If I've violated any kind of law or done anything, then put me in jail." I could see that they didn't have much of a leader and the jail was just right up there behind the courthouse.

They put me in jail and then they was just marching through and saying, "Goddamn, we'll hang you tonight. We'll break your neck," and all this kind of stuff. And, some gals come in there and I could see they thought, "Why, that's a damn shame to hang that nice looking boy like that." And an old boy that I went to school with down in Blue Mountain, was a bookkeeper for someone up there, and he come in. He never did speak to me and I didn't say anything to him and I could see him shaking his head to think, "By God, old Clay's one of

the top boys at school and to think he's in something like this." And they was calling me "nigger-lover" and all that stuff.

Well, Sheriff Campbell come in there. Of course, he knew I was the deputy sheriff over in Poinsett County, knew I was from a good family and all and he didn't want this damn thing. He was afraid he might be getting in a little trouble about that. If I'd been a flat stranger, he just might have made a different story and that's one way I always had it figured. I could do better by myself than I could with someone with me. He come in there and asked me, "East, would you like to get out of here?" And I told him, "Why sure, I haven't done a damn thing. I haven't violated any law. They got no right to put me in jail." So, he said, "Well, we're gonna take the state rangers and take you out." I told him, "Well, O.K." Well, that's when this boy spoke up and said, 'Clay, you're a damn fool if you go out of here. They're just laying a trap for you. If you go out of here, they'll get you just sure as the world.' And I told him, "Well, I'll take a chance on that. I'm going out." Well, there were three of these guys, there was a captain and two other guys, all in uniform. I still wasn't scared, I didn't believe that any damn guys would get me, somehow. So, that's what I'm telling you, that ain't bravery, you've got nothing to be brave about. The only time that I was afraid was when I walked down there with that damn lawyer, because I knew these guys was fixing to nail me. And, I had sat in that courtroom when I could feel that tension. You've never been in anything like that, I don't imagine. It was terrible. Everybody in there was so damn tight.

Well, anyway, we got in the car and started out toward Memphis. By that time, the captain and this other guy was following us, and already two or three carloads of guys was on the road after us. So, I told this guy, "Now, if those guys catch up with us, there ain't a damn bit of use of you getting hurt. You either give it to me or give me a chance to get that damn gun of yours and I'll get out and get away from you and you won't get shot." Those guys was really gonna shoot us up. And he said, "They're not getting by the captain back there." He said, "We've started out to take you into Memphis and that's where we're going to take you." But, I still figured they'd get us at West Memphis, but they didn't and there wasn't anybody else that showed up. After we got to the bridge, the guy got out on this end of the bridge and I thanked him for taking me in there and I went right down to the Press-Scimitar and told them about what had happened and they come out in the paper that afternoon with big headlines about what had happened over there.

They hired this lawyer from Helena, Arkansas.

They couldn't get a Memphis lawyer to go over there for nothing. Man, they wouldn't cross that river. Not for the union. But Mitch—I'm quite certain that it was Mitch—contacted someone and found out about this guy some way and he said hell yes, he'd take the case. And he took it and went to Forrest City and this damn gang ganged up on him and he told them, "You men are a bunch of fools. I'm an attorney. I'm working for a living. I don't care nothing about them niggers and croppers in there. All I'm interested in is in the money. I've put in a lot of time in school and been out a lot of expense in order to make a living being an attorney. I don't care nothing about these people." And they let the damn fool go ahead and plead the case and he got these guys out.

Strike

In September of '35, the union called its first major strike. Nearly 5,000 cotton pickers responded by staying out of the fields. No written contracts were gained, but most of the planters eventually agreed to pay higher wages. More important than the wages, however, was the boost to union membership. Following the strike, chapters were spontaneously organized in Oklahoma, Missouri, Tennessee, and Mississippi. By the end of the year, the union claimed a membership of 25,000.

STITH: The strike of '35 was one of the most unique things ever happened. It was well-planned. We decided after meeting a half a dozen times—and when I say we, every area had representatives, locals and from districts. We met in Memphis and talked this thing over starting back in early plantin' season about what we would have to do about trying to get some better wages because living costs had went up and wages wasn't going up. There was a lot of day labor involved. We had been able to get some of the things adjusted like commissaries or brozeen; a lot of that had disappeared. But the wages just wasn't going up any.

After meeting several times beginning in the early fall, I think it was, and working on this thing for another year, we decided upon a cotton picking strike. In the cotton picking season cotton is perishable to a certain extent. Cotton has got to get out of the field and get ginned up before the weather gets bad or you take a loss on your cotton; the quality of it goes down.

So we had decided a general strike would be the thing. But it taken a lot of planning to figure out how we were going to do it. The executive committee finally got together and had all these handbills printed up, brought them in and made packages to



STFU Headquarters were located on the second floor of this building in Memphis, Tennessee.

118

123

124

go to each area according to what they thought their needs would be. And they had them all passed out there. And then we set a strike date. All the representatives came in and got their strike handbill with strict instructions. They didn't put them out until that night, eleven o'clock was the time. And that night at eleven o'clock, they was all over Arkansas, Missouri, part of Tennessee, part of Mississippi and Alabama. And when foremen got up the next morning and found so many, they said an airplane put them out. And we did it all by hand or car. It was all done at the same time and that scared the farmers to death. They wouldn't agree to sign a contract with the union, but they started to make concessions to the labor. Well that's really what we were looking for; we was trying to make things better for the people. We'd love to have had a contract but we never dreamed of a contract. We thought it was impossible and it turned out to be just about that.

DILWORTH: It was Sunday night. We got our papers together at eleven o'clock exactly. Everyone, all over Arkansas where there was an organization alive, had to be on the job at 11:00 passing out leaflets. We'd cover this street, then we'd go to another. We ain't supposed to go back there on the same route because if you do, somebody is gonna see one of them things. Oooh, I don't know how many we passed out. We spread them handbills saying, "Don't go to the fields and pick no cotton," over every street in this town.

I was riding in my car. Marie Pierce, a student from Memphis, was riding in the back seat with Mr. Bolden. Mrs. Burton and I sat in the front. I was laying down on my stomach holding the door cracked open, and I'd push the leaflets through the crack and spread them out in the street. You pick up speed and that'd just make them things go flying all over the yards.

By the time we got down by Mr. Dean's house, we had done the whole route. Then this car came swooping by us. I said, "Cut the lights off and let's go right into these woods." We got down in a little curl and cut the motor off. If they had caught us, I don't know what they would've done to us. But, they couldn't tell where we was. They went out there where they was fixing the levee and got stuck in the mud. Water was up to our knees in the car. It was three o'clock that next morning when we got home and it was still raining. It wasn't no easy job.

White folks thought a plane had flown over there and spread all them leaflets. They were all over the state.

MITCHELL: There was a kind of unofficial bargaining. They wouldn't recognize the union as

such, but they'd watch to see what the union was going to demand, particularly after that cotton picking experience of 1935. We'd call a wage conference every year, maybe twice a year, with several representatives from each local union, and they would decide what we were going to ask for. Often, we'd make a survey of our members and have a ballot to see what they thought the union should ask. We'd do this before the wage conference. Then we'd tabulate all of the returns and say, here's what the members think that we can get. The conference would determine we can get a dollar per hundred this time. We would try that. We would announce that the union was demanding a dollar per hundred pounds for picking the cotton. We'd invite all plantation owners to meet with us to work out a contract and an agreement, but of course, they never did. This had the same general effect as a wage contract. It was kind of the old IWW idea. If you didn't have a contract, then you take action on the job. If the boss didn't pay the union rate, the people quit work and went somewhere else—where the union scale was paid.

We thought in terms of a trade union. I don't know if we really ever expected it to happen. At least we used all of the usual union terms. We didn't just go out and say this is the way we're going after it. We always wanted a contract signed by all of the plantation owners. We would work out model contracts. We had proposed contracts for sharecroppers and contracts for tenants and wage workers and we had circulated them around. Sometimes the fellows on the plantation would take them to the owner and ask him to sign the union contract. Sometimes they got thrown off the land as a result of doing that. The nearest thing that we ever had to such a contract was at the end of 1935. The lawyer for the union, whose name was Herman Goldberger, had been meeting with a plantation owner by the name of C.H. Dibble. Mr. Dibble was fair and liberal for that area. He'd come from some other area of the country and owned a medium sized plantation. He had, as I recall, thirteen families which meant 500 or 600 acres of cotton. Word got out that Dibble was negotiating a union contract. He was told by his banker that if he signed a contract with the union they would foreclose his mortgage and that he had to get rid of the union members. He served them notice about Christmas that they were going to be evicted if they did not move by the first of the year. Maybe we made a mistake. I don't know, but we laid down the law to Mr. Dibble at our convention that if he tried to evict these people, we were going to put them back in their houses. We said we were going to put a picket line around his plantation. It became a question as far as the entire community was concerned. I

mean, the upper class part of it, the guys on the right side of the tracks had Mr. Dibble do what he had threatened to do—evict all these families, which he proceeded to do. He threw them out in the middle of the winter.

Support

BUTLER: Sometimes I would just go to New York and make personal appeals to people. One of the ladies who took a big interest in raising funds for the union would make an appointment for me to see this one or that one or some other one and I'd go and try to talk them into making the donation. Donations was the only funds that we ever had in the union that amounted to anything because nobody was ever able to pay any dues: there was no money to pay dues with. Sometimes we'd take a dozen Negroes, just the pure old sharecropper type Negroes, and let them make these appeals for funds. Sometimes that worked better than for me to do it. Of course we never did have any funds ahead, we never did have enough money at any time to operate on, but we wouldn't have had anything if it hadn't been for that.

The Workers Defense League was one of our chief supporters. They raised a lot of money and they collected a lot of clothing, things of that kind and shipped down to distribute to the ones who were most in need. Our relation with the Workers Defense League was very close and very good. I'm not sure that went for everyone in the organization, but generally speaking that was the truth.

There was a New York committee that put on what they called National Sharecroppers Week. I was in New York I guess all of the week that had been designated and any number of others were there. Mrs. Roosevelt was at the big final meeting that we had that week; the Saturday night meeting. That committee had hired a professional fundraiser to organize a week of fund-raising. I don't

know what percentage they gave him for his labor, but they did raise quite a bit of money. I guess that at the end of that week, the union treasury had more money in it at one time than it ever had before or since. Might have had as much as two or three thousand dollars. I think they tried to do it over a time or two.

There was no definite salary. After some interest built up in New York and we began to get some contributions in, why I put in full time and I put in for expenses, you know. For gas and oil and for rooms to live in and so on. That was allowed out of whatever contributions we were getting.

For awhile, Mitchell got along the same way that I did. That is, he just drew enough out for himself and his family to live on. And I stayed with him part of the time, too. We did anything we could to cut the expenses and then later, in 1937, when we joined up with UCAPAWA, they arranged for me to have a salary of fifty dollars a week. So that went on for three or four months, as long as we stayed with it. I was about to get rich.

DILWORTH: I went to New York to make a speech for Sharecroppers' Week in 1946. Frank P. Graham sponsored me. I sat at the speaker's table, and everything you picked up carried their workers on it. I said, Lord have mercy. Every table was covered with white linen and there was somebody round every table. I couldn't see nobody. I just saw this clear blue sky. I made my speech, and when I got through, folks was just patting. I didn't a bit know what I said. I talked about ten minutes. And whenever I come to myself so that I could see the audience out there, I said, "We are climbing Jacob's ladder, and every rung goes higher and higher. We're going to organize the South as God being our helper." And the people just hollered. This was in the Henry Hudson Hotel. I stayed there five nights, room 284. And when I come out, I had integrated the hotel. I was the first colored to stay there.

We were a mass movement, something
like the civil rights movement 30 years later.

CIO Affiliation

In 1937, the Union, anxious to be a part of the CIO, affiliated with the United Cannery Agricultural Packinghouse and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). It was an uneasy and strained relationship from the beginning. The STFU found it virtually impossible to comply with the bureaucratic guidelines of the international union, and the UCAFAWA President, Donald Henderson, was neither sensitive to the union's needs, nor very astute in his assessment of the divisions that should be made among agricultural workers. Finally in 1939, the Executive Council of the STFU voted to withdraw, but not before the union had been torn apart by internal strife and its ranks depleted.

BUTLER: We joined the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America [UCAPAWA] in 1937. We had to convince them at Denver, and we went, and everything went along pretty smooth. I was made vice-president. It was supposed to be one union then, but like I say, it didn't work out. I thought it would be a good thing if we could do it, but when we tried it, we couldn't do it. The UCAFAWA had a set of officers that were determined to control everything, and the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union wasn't ready to be controlled, never was.

Well, I think they thought that it would be a big boost to their membership for one thing. UCAFAWA was practically a paper union. They didn't have any members to amount to anything at all, but since they were a part of the CIO, they were considered more important. So we joined in with them as I said, and it wasn't but a little while until they began trying to tell us what we had to do and how we had to collect dues and how we had to send a certain amount of dues to the UCAFAWA offices and all that sort of thing. We never could collect any dues, we never did. Oh, maybe one man would pay a dime a month, maybe a dime would roll in at the end of the year. People didn't have it and there was no such thing as collecting dues. So we pulled out then, pulled out of UCAFAWA.

STITH: McKinney was a communist, but I don't think his views were so different than mine when it comes down to the lower class man, the little man, especially the farmer. But I think his difference of opinion was where we should be as a union. Partially, he did, I know, agree with UCAFAWA about the organizing of farmers in one union, sharecroppers in another, and tenants in another. And that's where the difference came about between us, because we couldn't see it in that light.

We felt like that was a policy that would divide us instead of putting us together. He was stubborn about what he believed to be right—about principles. I don't know anything about his background. At that time I was very young. I was active in the union and only concerned with its activities.



E. B. McKinney

MITCHELL: We thought, and our people thought, that the CIO was going to sweep the whole country and was going to organize all the unorganized. That's what they talked about; they were going to bring about a complete change in the lives of everybody and make things better. Everybody was enthused about the CIO. John L. Lewis standing, defying the automobile companies saying, "Shoot me before you fire on these men who were in the factories, the sitdowns." It was inspiring to people who didn't know any better, who didn't know John Lewis, a business trade unionist whose interest was in getting a huge membership that could pay union dues. We wanted to be a union. We wanted to be in the mainstream of organized labor. We just felt that we must get into the CIO.

We thought and wrote in 1935 and 1936 to the AFL about the possibility of a charter as a national union. The response from Secretary Morrison was not very encouraging. I don't remember the exact words, but he considered us farmers and the AFL had fraternal relations with the Farmers' Union, the Grange and Farm Bureau, and they wouldn't be interested at that time. It was not until after the CIO experience that we even tried to get the AFL consideration.

We were naive, I guess. The ordinary trade unionist never understood the STFU. We were a mass movement, something like the civil rights movement 30 years later. We could have opened the doors in areas where there were farm people. We could have moved into the farming areas around any industrial area. We could have become a great political force, and been a great voice for the CIO in rural America. That's what we thought, that's what we saw in the CIO.

Leadership

STITH: I wasn't a full-time organizer until I moved to Gould. I still had a crop. I'd get up at five o'clock every morning and go to the field and do a day's work. I was a share tenant, I rented. I had a mule outfit to farm with; I had all my own tools and my own stock. If it was possible I would leave the day's work off and do it the next day, then I would leave and go do what the union wanted me to do. If not, I tried to do a day's work and go at night to do what they wanted me to do. I didn't have a car then. If it wasn't anywhere but 10 or 20 miles, I'd ride a horse. If it was farther, we always had one or two union people around who had a car who were willing to take me and the union got the gas.

The problem was that blacks in the agriculture field didn't have leaders with enough education to do what was necessary. That's number one. And number two, a black man wasn't recognized enough to get into the places where he needed to go, even if he had enough education. Even at that time government organizations didn't look at a black man too much. So a black person as president could not have been too successful in getting a lot of outside help. It was the major role of the union to bring in outside support, money, etc. It had to be. It was the only way we could survive. We had no funds. The members didn't have enough money to pay dues to the organization for it to operate. We had to have outside help. A black man was discussed sometimes, to my remembrance, as being president. And I was discussed at one time. But we decided, and it was partly my decision along with others, blacks and whites, that if a black man got to be president it might divide us. So we decided, well at least we'll put him in second spot, make him vice-president.

This is the way most blacks wanted it. There were some few who felt like they were able to lead. When one was found; and he felt that away, we always found somewhere to put him in a leadership position. I really got put into it. I didn't feel like I was a leader. I just wanted to help get things better. But they felt like I was, and they put me into it.

At that time we had a family membership. Where there was a widow involved, she was the head of the family, so she took out a legal membership. But where there was a man and his wife involved, she was a member too. She had a voice when it come down to talking or voting on.

Women were very active and made a lot of the decisions. Women decided to do things that men felt like they couldn't do. We had several locals around Cotton Plant and I believe in one of the locals all the officers were women. This was be-

cause men were afraid. Owners never bothered women. They never beat up any women. Oh yes, I think they did in Mississippi and maybe one place in Arkansas. But usually they would pick on the men. They was a little bit slow about bothering women. They might go to her and talk to her. And women look like always were apt to move out. They would walk up and say to the plantation owner, look, this is what I ain't gonna do.

In this case usually men took the first step. You'd always find somebody who felt it was not a woman's job. It's all right if we gonna use some women for help. And even though he might have been afraid, somebody always stepped forward. There are cases where women said, "I will," first and a man would say, "I'll do it, you don't have to."

I remember a lady by the name of Henrietta Green who was very outspoken. She was in the Howell local. At one time we were working on this large plantation that was rented. The manager didn't own it. He rented it from a widow. In making a sharecrop, instead of getting half of your corn, we got one-third of it. The manager said he had to give the lady owner a load; he took a load, and we'd take a load. So the union met and decided that we wasn't going to make any more crops on the third. It would have to be half. Henrietta Green, a strong woman in the Howell local, and my father, who was pretty active here locally, and I forget who the other person was, were the three people who made the decision that they would be the ones that would walk up to the boss and say, "We're not going to make it any more on thirds. We want half our corn." Henrietta was an older woman. She was along the age of my father. This is the way they rationalized it: I'm older than you are, and I don't have much to lose. Anyway, the manager answered, no! So they refused to plant corn. He said he didn't care. But everyone on the Howell plantation refused to plant corn. Ten days later the manager said he'd pay them half.

BUTLER: We considered the whole family as members of the union when any one of them, either the man or his wife, got interested, why we just counted them in as members of the union. We were not discriminatory in any way, so far as I recall.

Yes, we had some women, and especially there was one that could make just about as good a speech as any of the men could. Henrietta McGee was her name. She went with us on trips to New York and Washington, one place and another and made speeches before groups and was a big help in getting contributions, because she got right down to earth with the things that she had to say.

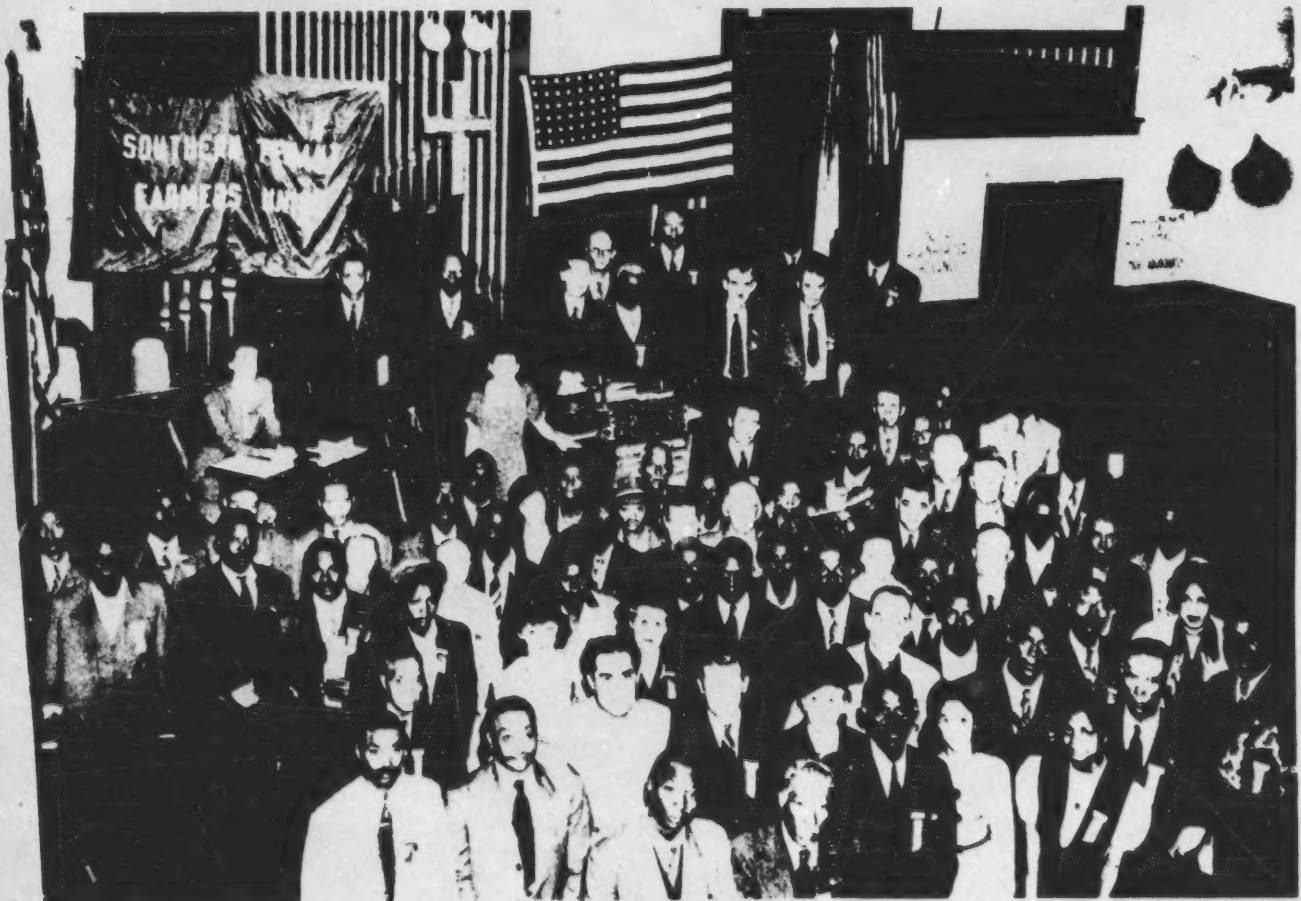
She was a widow from over there in eastern Arkansas somewhere, I don't know which town she

was from, but she was as active as any other union member that we ever had. And, to give you an idea of her character, she went with some of us to Atlantic City to the first convention of the CIO as a separate organization from the AFL. While we were there, I remember all of us went to a restaurant for a meal one time. Mrs. Roosevelt was there. Several of us went in and set down at the same table and Henrietta was in the group. She was black. Well, this waitress wouldn't serve her at all and Mrs. Roosevelt saw that the waitress wouldn't serve her. So Mrs. Roosevelt went over and invited Henrietta to come over and sit at her table. The same waitress came along and she didn't dare refuse, because of Mrs. Roosevelt, you know. So, she tried to apologize to Henrietta. She said, "You know, a while ago, I didn't know that you were a Puerto Rican." Well, she said, "I'm not. I'm a nigger, nigger sharecropper from down in Arkansas." All that the waitress could do was turn her head and not say anything. She went ahead and served her.

Migration

By the beginning of the war years, the mass base that the union had so successfully built earlier had begun to fade away. J. R. Butler left in 1942 to become a machinist. Mitchell and the vice-president, George Stith were able to arrange labor exchange programs to provide STFU members with higher paying jobs, usually in food processing canneries.

MITCHELL: We broke away from the Cannery and Agricultural Union of the AFL-CIO, and then we resumed the name Southern Tenant Farmers Union and kept the name and the organization through 1945 intact as it was. One of our outlets during the war time was sending workers to work in food processing and on farms out of the South. We started with the Farm Security Administration furnishing transportation. We sent 2,000 people to the West—California, Arizona, New Mexico and West Texas. We sent people with them to be kind of



STFU Convention, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1944

Photo courtesy of H. L. Mitchell

stewards to see that their contracts were lived up to. It wasn't really a contract. It was a government statement that they were going to be paid so much and that kind of thing. Then, after sending that group out there, we sent 500 to Florida to work in the vegetable harvest and I guess it must have been in the fall of 1942. It was right after the war had started and gotten underway. Then they passed a law, really to stop the union from sending people out of the South to work on jobs where there were labor shortages or alleged labor shortages. It required each individual who was transported by government funds to have the written consent of the county agricultural agent before he could leave his home. At the same time they authorized the first importation of Mexican-American and British West Indians to work on farms.

It was the same damn people that are doing everything: the damn big plantation owners, the power structure. We called it the system; you guys call it the power structure. It is all the same. See, we had made an inroad with the whites and the blacks here. We had done something that none of these agrarian movements had really done. They had all floundered on this damn race thing; but we didn't. We didn't flounder on it. We held our principles.

STITH: The union sent me into the Gould area. They had a lot of locals in here, and they had formed what was known as an area local. Mrs. Dilworth was the secretary of it. Actually headquarters was in her house, but Pine Bluff was where we finally wound up with an office. But they wanted me in this area to help out. It was heavily populated with sharecroppers and tenants and they thought that maybe, with my experience, I could come down here and help out. It was at the time that the union membership had begun to dwindle because the members were finding other places to go. The union would pay me according to my report, whatever time I put in they would pay me expenses. As the vice-president of the union you were called on to do many different jobs, to go to many different places, even though you may not be a full time employee. During the war, the Manpower Commission asked the American rederation of Labor if they could supply them with farm labor to work in the cannery food division and we was it.

The first time I shipped labor from Cotton Plant we couldn't get busses. So we decided that we would get a truck to take them over to Memphis, and from there arrangements were made for a train. The second load I shipped, we had three trucks left Cotton Plant going into Memphis, and the State Employment Security Divison had these trucks stopped in Forrest City and they put the

truck drivers in jail. As the vice president, I had to see that it was arranged. We didn't have local telephones so I had to go all the way to Brinkley to get to a public telephone to call in to Memphis and tell them what had happened. The people caught rides into Memphis; some walked, however they could get there.

DILWORTH: I took people out to New Jersey, out to California, to Washington, D.C., and even to Atlanta to work in the canneries. Getting people together was easy. I just notified them and talked at different churches. Asked how many wanted to go and I'd get the names. I carried 27 people on one ticket to California. We had the big buttons, with this hoe and plow and a ball of cotton on it, and I'd tell them, don't pull it off, just keep it around your neck, because that's your pass. We left here going through Oklahoma and down through Texas and they got laid up on a road there. And we stayed there a whole night till our train came along. I had already notified them that we was on the way. See, they had barracks with stoves and lights, beds and everything. We got there about three o'clock in the morning. They met us and I told them we had a lot of kids and the children were crying for milk. Them white men was running around just having a fit. I stayed two weeks in California, but at that time I had been taking a crew once a week.

The companies paid for your trip out. When you worked you had to pay the money back. That's the way it went. Most of the people I transported stayed. They was making good and that's why they just didn't want to come back. I didn't take the young people out. Those that went away and had jobs had their families with them and they stayed out there.

One day them white fellows came in the office when we was sending labor from Pine Bluff. They called theyself wanting to do something but they didn't do nothing. I don't know who they were, some kinda law. They come in and ask me, "Girl, you know what you doing? Don't you know it's against the law to move people from one area and send them off?" I said, "If my area don't produce nothing, let 'em go." That's just the way I talked to them. And they didn't do nothing to us.

WILLIAMS: I sent four of my children off with Mrs. Dilworth to New Jersey to work. First, I sent my son, John Williams, Jr. He went in 1944 and every summer thereafter for four years. He worked in a cannery and cooked tomato paste. He was 19 and was going to school at Durmont Baptist College. Out of their weekly earnings, they had to pay for their groceries and reimburse the money for the ticket that was given.

The next summer in 1945 I sent my oldest two daughters, Ruby and Sadie. They were 19 and 20. You had to be 18 or 19 to go. Altogether the three of them went. The girls wasn't going to college or nothing, but I just sent them on up there. They was working with me on the farm. But now when time come to go, well, I'd just take them out of there and let them go. I wanted to let them learn how to do something excusing chopping and picking cotton. They earned enough to do 'em a little.

Looking Back

STITH: Unfortunately, most of the people coming along now don't know anything about the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. All the things that the union fought for, that the people on the farms have been able to get like social security and minimum wage, they just see that the government just give them that. And when you tell them this is something that we fought for for years, that we went to Congress hobnobbing our way or going in trucks or busses or cars, they don't believe it.

BUTLER: Most of the unions have gotten to where they're not rank and file anyway. Even the industrial unions are controlled by officials that are elected once every two years or once every four years or sometimes maybe not that often. Back in the earlier days, when people thought about joining the union, it was something like joining a church, getting together to work together for the things they wanted. It was never a mass movement, you know, but it was big enough and so much out of the ordinary that it drew the attention of the world, and so in that way I think we did a lot of good. There were probably things that we could have done if we had known more about what to do, but we were just novices, we just had to play it by ear as we went, and that was all we could do.



FOOTNOTES FOR STFU

1. "Brozeen" is spelled phonetically; we know of no written form.
2. Deputy Paul D. Peacher had been responsible for breaking up a union meeting in Earle, Arkansas in January of 1936 where two men had been shot in the back and another beaten senseless. In June of that same year, Dr. Sherwood Eddy visited Peacher's prison farm and talked to thirteen black prisoners who all said they had been arrested for vagrancy, even though some of them were property owners and others had lived in the area for a number of years. Peacher was eventually indicted by a federal grand jury, convicted, and fined \$3500.

3. The issue of whether to remain affiliated with UCAPAWA became a major point of contention in the union in 1938-39. When the decision was finally made to leave, three of the union's best known black leaders, E. B. McKinney, Owen Whitfield, and Leon Turner, along with the Rev. Claude Williams chose to remain with the CIO.

NOTES FOR THE STFU

The most complete account of the STFU can be found in Donald Grubbs' *Cry From the Cotton*, University of North Carolina Press, 1971. Grubbs deals in depth with the impact of the Depression on cotton tenancy, and the New Deal's half hearted attacks on rural poverty. He traces the history of the union from its early days as an outgrowth of the Socialist Party through its demoralizing days in the UCAPAWA. Contains an extensive and useful bibliography.

For further reading, see the following:

Will Alexander, Edwin Embree, and Charles Johnson, *The Collapse of Cotton Tenancy*, University of North Carolina Press, 1935.

Jerold S. Auerbach, *Southern Tenant Farmers: Socialist Critics of the New Deal*, Labor History, Vol. 7, No. 1, Winter, 1966. (Also reprinted in the Bobbs-Merrill reprint series in black studies.)

Howard Kester, *Revolt Among the Sharecroppers*, Covici-Friede, 1936. This book was written while Kester was working actively with the union.

Mark Naison, *The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the CIO*. Originally published in *Radical America*, Vol. 2, No. 5, Sept-Oct., 1968, now available from the New England Free Press, 791 Tremont Street, Boston, Mass. A valuable and analytical account of the union's short lived affiliation with the CIO/UCAPAWA. See also recent article by Naison in *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, *Black Agrarian Radicalism in the Great Depression: The Threads of a Lost Tradition*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall, 1973.

The papers of the Southern Tenant Farmers' union are housed at the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and are also available from the Microfilming Corporation of America. For a complete listing of southern libraries that have purchased the papers on microfilm write to H. L. Mitchell, P. O. Box 2617, Montgomery, Alabama, 36105.

Additional oral interviews with members of the union have been conducted by Kate Born of the Department of History, Memphis State University, and will soon be available through the Memphis State Library.

IN EGYPT LAND

By John Beecher

I

It was Alabama, 1932
but the spring came
same as it always had.
A man just couldn't help believing
this would be a good year for him
when he saw redbud and dogwood everywhere in bloom
and the peachtree blossoming
all by itself
up against the gray boards of the cabin.
A man had to believe
so Cliff James hitched up his pair of old mules
and went out and plowed up the old land
the other man's land but he plowed it
and when it was plowed it looked new again
the cotton and corn stalks turned under
the red clay shining with wet
under the sun.

Years ago
he thought he bought this land
borrowed the money to pay for it
from the furnish merchant in Notasulga
big white man named Mr Parker
but betwixt the interest and the bad times coming
Mr Parker had got the land back
and nigh on to \$500 more owing to him
for interest seed fertilize and rations
with a mortgage on all the stock—
the two cows and their calves
the heifer and the pair of old mules—
Mr Parker could come drive them off the place any day
if he took a notion
and the law would back him.

Mighty few sharecroppers
black folks or white
ever got themselves stock like Cliff had
they didn't have any cows
they plowed with the landlord's mule and tools
they didn't have a thing.
Took a heap of doing without
to get your own stock and your own tools
but he'd done it
and still that hadn't made him satisfied.
The land he plowed
he wanted to be his.
Now all come of wanting his own land
he was back to where he started.
Any day
Mr Parker could run him off
drive away the mules the cows the heifer and the calves
to sell in town
take the wagon the plow tools the store-bought furniture
and the shotgun
on the debt.
No
that was one thing Mr Parker never would get a hold of
not that shotgun . . .

Remembering that night last year
remembering the meeting
in the church he and his neighbors always went to
deep in the woods
and when the folks weren't singing or praying or clapping
and stomping
you could hear the branch splashing over rocks
right out behind.
That meeting night
the preacher prayed a prayer
for all the sharecroppers
white and black
asking the good Lord Jesus
to look down
and see how they were suffering.
"Five cent cotton Lord
and no way Lord for a man to come out.
Fifty cents a day Lord for working in the field
just four bits Lord for a good strong hand
from dawn to dark Lord from can till can't
ain't no way Lord a man can come out.
They's got to be a way Lord show us the way . . ."
And then they sang.
"Go Down Moses" was the song they sang
"Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land
Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go"
and when they had sung the song
the preacher got up and he said
"Brothers and sister
we got with us tonight
a colored lady teaches school in Birmingham
going to tell us about the Union
what's got room for colored folks and white
what's got room for all the folks
that ain't got no land
that ain't got no stock
that ain't got no something to eat half the year
that ain't got no shoes
that raises all the cotton
but can't get none to wear
'cept old patchedy overhauls and floursack dresses.
Brothers and sisters
listen to this colored lady from Birmingham
who the Lord done sent I do believe
to show us the way . . ."

Then the colored lady from Birmingham
got up and she told them.
She told them how she was raised on a farm herself
a sharecrop farm near Demopolis
and walked six miles to a one-room school
and six miles back every day
till her people moved to Birmingham
where there was a high school for colored
and she went to it.
Then she worked in white folks' houses
and saved what she made
to go to college.

She went to Tuskegee
and when she finished
got a job teaching school in Birmingham
but she never could forget
the people she was raised with
the sharecrop farmers
and how they had to live.
No
all the time she was teaching school
she thought about them
what could she do for them
and what they could do for themselves.
Then one day
somebody told her about the Union . . .
If everybody joined the Union she said
a good strong hand would get what he was worth
a dollar (Amen sister)
instead of fifty cents a day.
At settling time the cropper could take his cotton to the
gin
and get his own fair half and the cotton seed
instead of the landlord hauling it off and cheating on the
weight
"All you made was four bales Jim" when it really was six
(Ain't it God's truth?)
and the Union would get everybody the right to have a
garden spot
not just cotton crowded up to the house
and the Union would see the children got a schoolbus
like the white children rode in every day
and didn't have to walk twelve miles.
That was the thing
the children getting to school
(Amen)
the children learning something besides chop cotton and
pick it
(Yes)
the children learning how to read and write
(Amen)
the children knowing how to figure
so the landlord wouldn't be the only one
could keep accounts
(Preach the Word sister).

Then the door banging open against the wall
and the Laws in their lace boots
the High Sheriff himself
with his deputies behind him.
Folks scrambling to get away
out the windows and door
and the Laws' fists going clunk clunk clunk
on all the men's and women's faces they could reach
and when everybody was out and running
the pistols going off behind them.
Next meeting fight
the men that had them brought shotguns to church
and the High Sheriff got a charge of birdshot in his body
when Ralph Gray with just his single barrel
stopped a car full of Laws
on the road to the church
and shot it out with their 44's.
Ralph Gray died
but the people in the church
all got away alive.

The crop was laid by.
From now till picking time
only the hot sun worked
ripening the bolls
and men rested after the plowing and plowing
women rested
little boys rested
and little girls rested
after the chopping and chopping with their hoes.
Now the cotton was big.
Now the cotton could take care of itself from the weeds
while the August sun worked
ripening the bolls.

Cliff James couldn't remember ever making a better crop
on that old red land
he'd seen so much of
wash down the gullies toward the Tallapoosa
since he'd first put a plow to it.
Never a better crop
but it had taken the fertilize
and it had taken work
fighting the weeds
fighting the weevils . . .
Ten bales it looked like it would make
ten good bales when it was picked
a thousand dollars worth of cotton once
enough to pay out on seed and fertilize and furnish for
the season
and the interest and something down
on the land
new shoes for the family to go to church in
work shirts and overalls for the man and boys
a bolt of calico for the woman and girls
and a little cash money for Christmas.

Now though
ten bales of cotton
didn't bring what three used to.
Two hundred and fifty dollars was about what his share
of this year's crop would bring
at five cents a pound
not even enough to pay out on seed and fertilize and
furnish for the season
let alone the interest on the land Mr Parker was asking
for
and \$80 more on the back debt owing to him.
Mr Parker had cut his groceries off at the commissary
last month
and there had been empty bellies in Cliff James' house
with just cornbread buttermilk and greens to eat.
If he killed a calf to feed his family
Mr Parker could send him to the chain-gang
for slaughtering mortgaged stock.

Come settling time this fall
Mr Parker was going to get every last thing
every dime of the cotton money
the corn
the mules
the cattle
and the law would back him.
Cliff James wondered

why had he plowed the land in the spring
 why had he worked and worked his crop
 his wife and children alongside him in the field
 and now pretty soon
 they would all be going out again
 dragging their long sacks
 bending double in the hot sun
 picking Mr Parker's cotton for him.

Sitting on the stoop of his cabin
 with his legs hanging over the rotten board edges
 Cliff James looked across his fields of thick green cotton
 to the woods beyond
 and a thunderhead piled high in the south
 piled soft and white like cotton on the stoop
 like a big day's pick
 waiting for the wagon
 to come haul it to the gin.
 On the other side of those woods
 was John McMullen's place
 and over yonder just east of the woods
 Ned Cobb's and beyond the rise of ground
 Milo Bentley lived that was the only new man
 to move into the Reeltown section that season.
 Milo just drifted in from Detroit
 because his work gave out up there
 and a man had to feed his family
 so he came back to the farm
 thinking things were like they used to be
 but he was finding out different.

Yes
 everybody was finding out different
 Cliff and John and Ned and Milo and Judson Simpson
 across the creek
 even white croppers like Mr Sam and his brother Mr Bill
 they were finding out.
 It wasn't many years ago Mr Sam's children
 would chunk at Cliff James' children
 on their way home from school
 and split little Cliff's head open with a rock once
 because his daddy was getting too uppity
 buying himself a farm.
 Last time they had a Union meeting though at Milo
 Bentley's place
 who should show up but Mr Sam and Mr Bill
 and asked was it only for colored
 or could white folks join
 because something just had to be done
 about the way things were.
 When Cliff told them
 it was for all the poor farmers
 that wanted to stick together
 they paid their nickel to sign up
 and their two cents each for first month's dues
 and they said they would try to get
 more white folks in
 because white men and black
 were getting beat with the same stick these days.

Things looked worse than they ever had in all his time of
 life
 Cliff James thought
 but they looked better too
 they looked better than they ever had in all his time of life
 when a sharecropper like Ralph Gray

not drunk but cold sober
 would stand off the High Sheriff with birdshot
 and get himself plugged with 44's
 just so the others at the meeting could get away
 and after that the mob hunting for who started the Union
 beating men and women up with pistol butts and bull
 whips
 throwing them in jail and beating them up more
 but still not stopping it
 the Union going on
 more people signing up
 more and more every week
 meeting in houses on the quiet
 nobody giving it away
 and now white folks coming in too.

Cliff James looked over his ripening cotton to the woods
 and above the trees the thunderhead piled still higher in
 the south
 white like a pile of cotton on the stoop
 piling up higher and higher
 coming out of the south
 bringing storm . . .

III

"You"
 Cliff James said
 "nor the High Sheriff
 nor all his deputies
 is gonna git them mules."
 The head deputy put the writ of attachment back in his
 inside pocket
 then his hand went to the butt of his pistol
 but he didn't pull it.
 "I'm going to get the High Sheriff and help"
 he said
 "and come back and kill you all in a pile."

Cliff James and Ned Cobb watched the deputy whirl the
 car around
 and speed down the rough mud road.
 He took the turn skidding
 and was gone.
 "He'll be back in a hour" Cliff James said
 "if'n he don't wreck hisself."
 "Where you fixin' to go?" Ned Cobb asked him.
 "I's fixin' to stay right where I is."
 "I'll go git the others then."
 "No need of eve'ybody gittin' kilt" Cliff James said.
 "Better gittin' kilt quick
 than perishin' slow like we been a'doin' " and Ned Cobb
 was gone
 cutting across the wet red field full of dead cotton plants
 and then he was in the woods
 bare now except for the few green pines
 and though Cliff couldn't see him
 he could see him in his mind
 calling out John McMullen and telling him about it
 then cutting off east to Milo Bentley's
 crossing the creek on the foot-log to Judson Simpson's . .
 Cliff couldn't see him
 going to Mr Sam or Mr Bill about it
 no

this was something you couldn't expect white folks to get
in on
even white folks in your Union.

There came John McMullen out of the woods
toting that old musket of his.
He said it went back to Civil War days
and it looked it
but John could really knock a squirrel off a limb
or get a running rabbit with it.
"Here I is," John said
and "What you doin' 'bout you folks?"
"What folks?"
"The ones belongin' to you.
You chillens and you wife."
"I disremembered 'em," Cliff James aid.
"I done clean disremembered all about my chillens and
my wife."
"They can stay with mine," John said.
"We ain't gonna want no womenfolks nor chillens
not here we ain't."

Cliff James watched his family going across the field
the five backs going away from him
in the wet red clay among the dead cotton plants
and soon they would be in the woods
his wife
young Cliff
the two girls
and the small boy . . .
They would just have to get along
best way they could
because a man had to do
what he had to do
and if he kept thinking about the folks belonging to him
he couldn't do it
and then he wouldn't be any good to them
or himself either.
There they went into the woods
the folks belonging to him gone
gone for good
and they not knowing it
but he knowing it
yes God
he knowing it well.

When the head deputy got back
with three more deputies for help
but not the High Sheriff
there were forty men in Cliff James' cabin
all armed.
The head deputy and the others got out of the car
and started up the slope toward the cabin.
Behind the dark windows
the men they didn't know were there
sighted their guns.
Then the deputies stopped.
"You Cliff James!" the head deputy shouted
"come on out
we want to talk with you."
No answer from inside.
"Come on out Cliff
we got something we want to talk over."
Maybe they really did have something to talk over
Cliff James thought

maybe all those men inside
wouldn't have to die for him or he for them . . .
"It's goin' out," he said.
"No you ain't," Ned Cobb said.
"Yes I is," Cliff James said
and leaning his shotgun against the wall
he opened the door just a wide enough crack
for himself to get through
but Ned Cobb crowded in behind him
and came out too
without his gun
and shut the door.
Together they walked toward the Laws.
When they were halfway Cliff James stopped
and Ned stopped with him
and Cliff called out to the Laws
"It's ready to listen white folks."

"This is what we got to say nigger!"
and the head deputy whipped out his pistol.
The first shot got Ned
and the next two got Cliff in the back
as he was dragging Ned to the cabin.
When they were in the shooting started from inside
everybody crowding up to the windows
with their old shotguns and muskets
not minding the pistol bullets from the Laws.
Of a sudden John McMullen
broke out of the door
meaning to make a run for his house
and tell his and Cliff James' folks
to get a long way away
but a bullet got him in the head
and he fell on his face
among the dead cotton plants
and his life's blood soaked into the old red land.

The room was full of powder smoke and men groaning
that had caught pistol bullets
but not Cliff James.
He lay in the corner quiet
feeling the blood run down his back and legs
but when somebody shouted
"The Laws is runnin' away!"
he got to his feet and went to the door and opened it.
Sure enough three of the Laws
were helping the fourth one into the car
but it wasn't the head deputy.
There by the door-post was John McMullen's old musket
where he'd left it when he ran out and got killed.
Cliff picked it up and saw it was still loaded.
He raised it and steadied it against the door-post
aiming it at where the head deputy would be sitting
to drive the car.
Cliff only wished
he could shoot that thing like John McMullen . . .

IV

He didn't know there was such a place in all Alabama
just for colored.
They put him in a room to himself
with a white bed and white sheets

and the black nurse put a white gown on his black body
after she washed off the dried black blood.
Then the black doctor came
and looked at the pistol bullet holes in his back
and put white bandages on
and stuck a long needle in his arm
and went away.

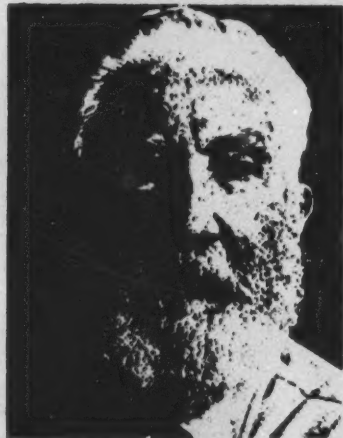
How long ago was it
he stayed and shot it out with the Laws?
Seemed like a long time
but come to think of it
he hid out in Mr Sam's corn crib
till the sun went down that evening
then walked and walked all the night-time
and when it started to get light he saw a cabin
with smoke coming out the chimney
but the woman wouldn't let him in to get warm
so he went on in the woods and lay down
under an old gum tree and covered himself with leaves
and when he woke it was nearly night-time again
and there were six buzzards perched in the old gum tree
watching him . . .
Then he got up and shoosed the buzzards away
and walked all the second night-time
and just as it was getting light
he was here
and this was Tuskegee
where the Laws couldn't find him
but John McMullen was dead in the cotton field
and the buzzards would be at him by now
if nobody hadn't buried him
and who would there be to bury him
with everybody shot or run away or hiding?

In a couple of days it was going to be Christmas
yes Christmas
and nobody belonging to Cliff James
was going to get a thing
not so much as an orange or a candy stick
for the littlest boy.
What kind of a Christmas was that
when a man didn't even have a few nickels
to get his children some oranges and candy sticks
what kind of a Christmas and what kind of a country
anyway
when you made ten bales of cotton

five thousand pounds of cotton
with your own hands
and you wife's hands
and all your children's hands
and then the Laws came to take your mules away
and drive your cows to sell in town
and your calves
and your heifer
and you couldn't even get commissary credit
for coffee molasses and sow-belly
and nobody in your house had shoes to wear
or any kind of fitting Sunday clothes
and no Christmas for nobody . . .
"Go Down Moses" was the song they sang
and when they had finished singing
it was so quiet in the church
you could hear the branch splashing over rocks
right out behind.
Then the preacher got up and he preached . . .

"And there was a man what fought to save us all
he wrapped an old quilt around him
because it was wintertime and he had two pistol bullets
in his back
and he went out of his house
and he started walking across the country to Tuskegee.
He got mighty cold
and his bare feet pained him
and his back like to killed him
and he thought
here is a cabin with smoke coming out the chimney
and they will let me in to the fire
because they are just poor folks like me
and when I have got warm
I will be on my way to Tuskegee
but the woman was afeared
and barred the door again him
and he went and piled leaves over him in the woods
waiting for the night-time
and six buzzards settled in an old gum tree
watching did he still breathe . . ."

The Sheriff removed Cliff James from the hospital to the
country jail on December 22. A mob gathered to lynch the
prisoner on Christmas day. For protection he was taken
to jail in Montgomery. Here Cliff James died on the stone
floor of his cell, December 27, 1932.



"In Egypt Land" is taken from
John Beecher's *To Live and Die*
in Dixie, 1906. Mr. Beecher
has been active in popular
struggles in the South all his life
and published a number of
other poetry books. His
collected poems will appear in a
single volume published by
Macmillan in the Spring, 1974.

VII TECHNOLOGY

PLANTATION UNDER THE MACHINE:

On the alluvial lands of the Mississippi River and its tributaries the plantation system reached its fullest development. By 1810 in the cotton parishes of the Louisiana delta slaves already were from 55 to 63 percent of the total population. By 1840 in Bolivar and Issaquena counties of the Yazoo-Mississippi delta where settlement was retarded by floods, 72 percent of the population were slaves. At the outbreak of the War between the States 89 percent of the total population in that area were slaves, a proportion approached in the Cotton Belt only across the river in delta parishes of Louisiana.

Not only did the proportion of slave to free population approximate nine to one in sections of the delta, but the concentration of slaves held by each cotton plantation was the highest in the South. In 1860 when the average holding of slaves ranged from 17 to 47 in the older upland cotton areas of the Southeast, from 10 to 49 in upland areas of Alabama and Mississippi, and from 16 to 29 in upland regions west of the River, the average reached 55 in the Yazoo delta, 117 in Concordia Parish of the Louisiana delta, 118 in Issaquena County, Mississippi, and 125 in Rapides Parish in the Arkansas Valley.

Since Emancipation large plantations have survived more vigorously in the delta than anywhere in the Cotton Belt, with sharecropping and tenancy substituted for slavery as their foundation. Today about 85 percent of the farm land is operated in plantations; the largest in the world is in Bolivar County. In county after county of the delta in Mississippi and Louisiana the colored farm population still outnumbered the white by four and five to one, and even more. Only on the alluvial lands of southeast Missouri and adjacent Arkansas delta where cotton

production developed late after the Civil War do whites on the land outnumber the blacks.

Methods of producing cotton have remained primitive in the delta. One Negro behind one mule drawing a simple cultivator down long rows is still the common sight. Hoeing and picking are by hand as they were in 1793. Many hands are needed for chopping in late Spring and many more are needed for picking in early Fall. But plowing, planting, and cultivating require few workers, and between seasons and in winter there is idleness. To meet the heavy seasonal demands the plantations were drenched with laborers, and large families were encouraged. Then, since labor was ample, cheap, and must be supported anyway, there was slight incentive for more progressive methods of tillage.

But a series of changes during the 1930's is dealing the old system a series of heavy blows—a collapse in the price of cotton, the plow-up of cotton and curtailment of acreage to stiffen prices with government checks to farm operators who cooperate, a national program of public relief, and finally, perfection of the all-purpose, row-crop tractor. Faced with bankruptcy and loss of their plantations, landlords have begun to question the paternalism which since slavery has laid upon them the responsibility of caring for their people from one crop to the next. Under economic pressure they are yielding, and relief makes it easier to yield. More and more they throw the care of their workers between crops upon the public, and let their people drift to the towns. Mechanization accelerates the process, for one man with tractor and four-row tillage equipment can do the work of eight mules and eight Negroes.

The record of power farming in cutting cotton workers from the land is already impressive. A pattern of mobile labor is developing. The land-

less cotton worker's year is being divided into occational employment by the day on the plantations between May and December, and virtual idleness on relief in the towns from December to May.

This problem, originating in the South, is national in its repercussions. In January 1939 more than a thousand persons, white and black, encamped in the open along the highways of southeastern Missouri and the Arkansas delta in protest against the changes on the plantations of which they are the victims. Already whites from this section are picking cotton in Arizona and peas in California. Negroes in small numbers follow the well-worn channels cut by earlier migrations to the North. No tide of blacks has yet started West.

HEARD IN THE DELTA, 1937

STATE OFFICIAL, MEMPHIS:

"Modern efficiency has hit the farms like everywhere else. Since the twenties the banks and loan companies have more and more been interested in the plantations. The banks, loan companies, and business men figure costs on the farms. They say, 'Why maintain a nigger the year around when they need him only a few months?' It's simpler to let 'em go and cut down overhead. They buy tractors and the tenants and croppers come to the cities and we put them on relief. More and more they drive them into town and then want them back only for day labor."

NEGRO EX-CROPPER, NOW TRACTOR DRIVER AT \$1.50 A DAY, ARKANSAS DELTA:

"Most every farm—most every big farm—in this country has tractors on it. For the owners hit's good, but for the tenants this is much worser."

PLANTER WHO USES TRACTORS AND DAY LABOR, ISSAQUENA COUNTY:

"There were 34 tenant families on this plantation until 1935. Now I have 11 families all on day labor. When they get organized the way they are starting to organize a union up in Arkansas, they won't be no more tenants unless they reduce their shares from halves to thirds. They'll use tractors."



TOWN NEGRO, GREENVILLE, MISSISSIPPI:

"Tractors are against the black man. Every time you kill a mule you kill a black man. You've heard about the machine picker? That's against the black man, too."

OFFICIAL OF TENANT FARMERS' UNION:

"The causes of the present situation are mechanization and large-scale ownership, the government checks, and relief. The big farmers are changing to day labor. Then they don't have to feed their families. They can bring labor from town to work by the day, and they can collect the entire government rental themselves. The AAA contract says the landowner can't cut his tenants to day labor, but after the contract is signed they *put* them on day labor. That's what started the union—the fight to get half of the check."

SHARECROPPER:

"These things are a pressin' on us in the State of Mississippi."

PLAINS, HILLS, AND FARMERS

THE ROAR OF TRACTORS HAS BEEN REPLACING THE SOUND OF NEGRO SONGS here and there on Southern farms in the twentieth century. Those steel mules and other mechanical farm implements are especially in vogue on the Texas plains, where one may "plow a furrow a mile long" and consider farming a "sedentary occupation." Tractor farmers are giving small farmers keen competition for control of the lands in that state. It is estimated that half a million Texas farm workers, with their labor-saving machinery, produce as much cotton as several million workers in India. Steel mules have replaced or supplemented the more natural and stubborn variety on not a few farms of the Southeast, particularly in the less hilly areas. However, the farmers of the South use more mule flesh for



Forty Acres and Steel Mules by H. C. Nixon gives further information about the 1930's.

plow power than any other region. There are many farms which are too small or too rough and hilly for any great use of elaborate machinery. Many small farmers are too poor to buy machinery, and there are farmers who could not use it if they had it. There are spots of land which would not yield sufficient returns to pay for mechanical cultivation.

The steel mule demands more than forty acres. It demands, moreover, fairly good acres and a degree of human competence to justify its existence in agriculture. It harmonizes neither with individualistic, small-scale proprietary farming nor with the South's traditional combination of absentee farm ownership and low-type share tenancy. Highly mechanized farming and inefficient plantation business methods do not go together.

FORTY ACRES AND STEEL MULES

Mechanization of agriculture suggests large-scale operation, which, in turn, suggests farming by wealthy individuals, by corporations, or by co-operative enterprise. The individual farmer with only forty acres and a mule can not compete, either as tenant or owner, with mechanized large-scale production of major staples without lowering his standard of living. The steel mule ever threatens to plow him under.

The eastern section of the cotton belt, with boll weevil troubles and Texas competition, had a mixture of agricultural reform and exodus of farmers in the fabulous twenties. In the depression days of the thirties it experienced a back-to-the-poor-land movement and as acute a problem of poverty as was known in Western Europe or America. The South of poverty is really the Southeast, for Texas and Oklahoma, though cotton states, are excluded from the South by many tests of economy and culture. These two states belong to the West on many counts rather than to the less wealthy South, though they are by no means free from rural poverty. The plains and hills of the South, with a mixture of modern and antiquated methods of farming, have revealed an agriculture which has many of the human insecurities of industry plus other risks not known to industry. This region has certain insecurities of agriculture not common to other farm areas.



The South today, especially the Southeast, is essentially a land of hillbillies and other ruralites, whose chief contact with the commerce and culture of the world is through hick towns. There are open spaces between the towns, and there are valleys between the hills, which grade downward from mountains to rolling plains, with the whole topography finally fading into coastal sands or delta bottoms.

It is natural that "hillbilly" should be a prevalent term in the Southeast. Along with the plains and plains people of the Southwest, the hill sections and the hill persons have constituted the most dynamic items in the civilization south of the Potomac since slavery. As decisive factors in human geography, the hills and mountains of Dixie can hardly be overestimated. More accessible or more penetrable for human life than the Western ranges, they are salubrious and tree-covered. They can supply tall tales and tall men. Unlike the Himalayas or the American Rockies, they lack those excessively rugged features which seem to "paralyze the mind." They release a heavy rainfall and feed a legion of streams and navigable rivers. These rain-river factors made possible a commercial agriculture between mountain and coast with the beginnings of human settlements, so that the plantation economy could develop step by step with a receding frontier. The Appalachians indirectly stimulated, guided and limited the spread of the slavery-plantation system; they

constituted a dividing wedge against the solidarity of Southern interest and effort in the Civil War; and they furnished the basis and backbone of the Southern industrial revolution after that war. They brought the hillbillies to the forefront. They give variety to farm problems and cotton problems.

The up-country has really been important in Southern life since the middle of the colonial era of Virginia. But prior to 1860 it yielded social leadership to a lowland aristocracy. The low-country has contributed much to the tone and tradition of Southern life. When the South looks at its past it looks at a charming "agrarian way of life," which was made possible by rivers and river bottoms, a commercial agriculture, and the labor of human slaves. This view, which is available through the eyes of foreign travellers, overlooks the fact that the charming life was at no time the privilege of more than a few thousand families, while slaves, "poor whites," yeomen farmers and small slaveowners constituted the millions of the population and furnished the concealed reality of Southern economy.



The seeming stability of the social structure of the old South was due to the shifting conditions resulting from a comparative abundance of new lands for the spread of slavery and cotton culture. Southern hillbillies did not seek the end of the slaveocracy, for it was expanding and recruiting membership from the hills. Nonslaveowners expected to become small slaveowners, and small slaveowners expected to become large ones. More slaves also meant more lands. Jefferson Davis himself was an example of an upward climb into a land-and-slavery aristocracy whose demand for expansion he militantly supported. The hope and flavor of society came from the top, which also handed down to posterity a body of traditions and an extreme distaste for criticism or analysis of labor relations.

Whatever the values of the civilization of the ante-bellum South, that civilization was insecure. It was socially too much like that of Russia before the World War and sure to fall sooner or later. It was characterized by a dynamic growth of population, demanding a parallel expansion of economic activity. This demand was met between 1830 and 1860 in the same way a similar demand was met between 1865 and 1930, through an expansion of cotton production, supplemented by an industrial expansion particularly in the last decade of the period. The limits to cotton acreage expansion were limits to slavery, and concern over this fact gave Southern leaders of the fifties the jitters. J. D. B. De Bow, the ante-bellum champion of Southern industrialism, predicted the problem of a surplus slave population and urged that it be met by an expansion of factories and railroads, by "an industrial revolution in the South." Industrial expansion would absorb surplus slave labor released from the farms. But this idea was opposed by Southerners who knew or feared that an industrial revolution would terminate slavery. Had De Bow included a forecast of the growth of the white population, he would have been more nearly correct as an observer of the uneven relationship between Southern population and Southern economy.



Population has been the most consistent surplus crop of the South, and the older parts of the region have been exporting such a surplus for a hundred years. It has cost this section many hundred millions of dollars to rear and educate its net export of population in the twentieth century. A. P. Brigham, the geographer, thirty years ago observed that "a hundred millions of people could live within the valleys and on the wide plains of the old Confederacy." Much more has been done in the region of the Confederacy toward producing a hundred million people than toward providing a decent living for a fraction of that number. The census of 1930 showed a net export of more than three million population from the South. Population increase and shiftings constitute the most dynamic set of Southern problems.

The South is a land of farms and farmers. It contains about half the

farmers of the country, and, therefore, a proportionately small share of the nation's industrial population. The farm population of any one of half a dozen Southern states outnumbers by scores of thousands that of the largest farm state of the North. To appraise the South is to appraise farmers, whether for the art of living or for the lack of a living. Even Southern Indians, prior to their removal, had developed agricultural habits to an extent not commonly attained by their Northern kindred. Agricultural development was particularly true of the lowland Creeks and the upland Cherokees.



Geographic factors in the South have favored an agricultural exploitation on a rather easy-going basis and as a policy of least resistance. Most of the region receives an annual rainfall of more than fifty inches and offers a growing season of more than two hundred frostless nights, the growing time required for cotton. Incidentally it is the long summer rather than the extremely hot summer which characterizes the South as a whole and tends to moderate the tempo of human activity. The soil of the region, which escaped the glacial influences, has generally been found softer and easier to clear and break up, as well as to cultivate, than much of that of the rest of the country, especially of New England. A wide variety of soil qualities is found in the South. There are coastal plains which were made partly by deposits from a receding sea. This land in spots has a productivity sufficient only for "piney woods" unless tons of fertilizer be used, as in Florida, for an agricultural capture of the climate. There are level stretches of high fertility, especially the black belt of Alabama, the delta of the Mississippi, and the "black waxie" plains of Texas, while the Virginia "tidewater" was rich enough to cradle an aristocracy. The rule of variety applies equally to the soil of the uplands. The limestone valleys of such inland rivers as the Tennessee and the Cumberland deserve mention for sustained productivity. The mountains contain rich coves as well as marginal areas and government lands which man has never sought as a free gift.

The comparatively soft soil, the many large and small hills, the heavy rainfall without deep freezes, the staple crops which require abundant plant food and frequent plowing—these factors have combined to effect much more soil exhaustion and erosion in the South than has been true elsewhere in America. They must be taken into account in any explanation of the old and continuous Southern practice of abandoning old lands for new. They have forced folk movements.

The distinctive crops of the Southland, though heavy taxers of the soil, have an unusual commercial value in proportion to weight and bulk. Cotton, tobacco, sugar, rice, or citrus fruits can bear a higher traffic cost than corn, wheat, oats, or even livestock. Corn in olden days had to

be turned into spirituous liquid before it could be hauled overland to market as far as could cotton. On the other hand, the Southern agricultural staples have always been in reach of relatively cheap transportation. A network of river traffic preceded the coming of railroads and

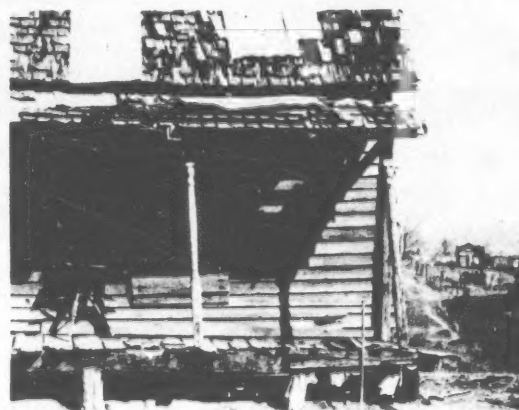


touched seaports, which were not excessively distant from farm communities of the crescent-shaped South. Agriculture brought railroads for supplementary purposes into much of the South, while railroads had to take agriculture into much of the West.

The distinctive crops of the South are commodities which must immediately enter into the channels of commerce, for they can not be consumed to any appreciable degree on the producing farm or plantation. A grain farmer of the North or West has a product to eat, feed and sell, and necessity or direct expectation of profit may impel him to practice an agricultural program with a scientific and economic balance. He may, for instance, use hogs as "freight condensers" for corn. But a cotton

farmer, a tobacco farmer, or a sugar farmer can neither consume his product nor utilize it in the production of other items for sale. He produces for a world market, a market which is complicated and which he does not understand. He is a part of the game of commerce, but his role in this game is the extremely easy function of direct selling for a price fixed by others, by fate.

The economy of Southern agriculture is, for the farmer, a seemingly simple economy, suggesting minimum requirements of private intelligence or public planning. Cotton, the chief crop, always sells for something and can be produced by almost any class or type of farmer. It is a product which responds to varying kinds and degrees of husbandry, with results corresponding to the amount and character of attention applied to planting and cultivation. It is unlike other crops, as corn for instance, in this respect. A farmer does not have to plan and hustle to grow cotton, though intelligent planning and hustling will produce ever so much more cotton. Many a farmer has worn out his land by repeated crops of cotton without realizing, until too late, that he was actually selling his soil in annual installments. Soil robbery, hillside gullies, individualism, laissez faire, and a colonial economy have gone together in the land of cotton. The land was there to exploit, then why not exploit it, with a climate inviting one to human laziness? The exploitation might apply not only to soil, but to timber, with a Logtown ceasing to have either logs or townsmen.



Clothing and housing requirements are less for those at the bottom level of subsistence than in zones farther north, unless it be emphasized that climate in many parts of the South makes porches a virtual necessity and an institution. (Keenly do I remember with what regret when a boy I had to leave the country front porch and its gossip conversation on late Sunday afternoons to do the barnyard chores!) However, the much-needed porch is often absent from Southern shacks.

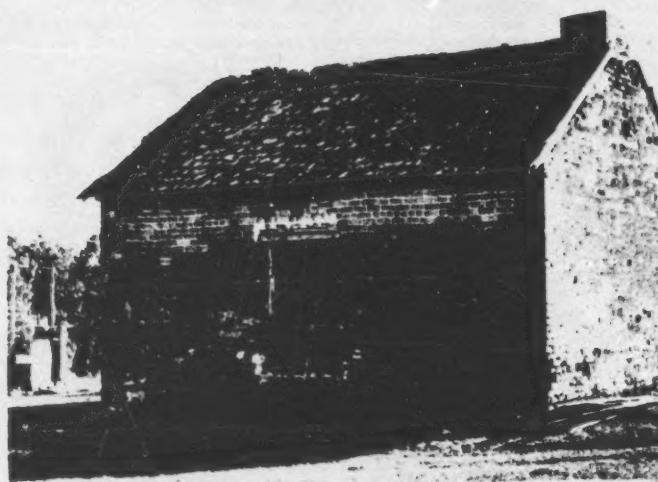
The South does not lead the nation in the purchase and wearing of shoes, as was too pointedly indicated a few years ago by Secretary Frances Perkins, of the Federal Department of Labor. Our articulate majority spokesmen were rather denunciatory of this comment on the lack of shoes, as though barefoot boys in Dixie were unknown in summer time. Well, there are white women and girls working in bare feet in cotton fields and farm houses in sight of the Alabama scene where these words are written. I have seen white men in this community "stepping on the gas" with bare feet in antique Fords. I once heard of a North Georgia farmer who continued to go barefooted after accumulating several thousand dollars. I have seen young men, white and colored, returning from church with shoes tied together and flung over a shoulder to save shoes for future church attendance and to save feet from a pressure to which they were not accustomed. I have heard a scrap of Negro folksong, running as follows:

"O honey, when I had you,
The di'monds you wo';
Now some other scutler's got you,
Barefooted you go."

Public charities, prior to recent trends of urbanization, have been less necessary in the South than elsewhere to prevent actual death from starvation or exposure to the weather. There might be undernourishment, inadequate clothing, and lack of medical attention for scattered thousands, but such cases on the countryside have found a way of remaining in the background. It is a statistical fact that the milk deficiency in the

Southern diet is equal to a large part of the national production. Moreover, the South has long had problems of unemployment, which could be classed as serious, though frequently concealed, partial or seasonal. There were periods of idleness on plantations in the days of slavery. However, slaves, like WPA workers of a later day, were sometimes used on beautification and improvement projects, but for private purposes. The labor cost of the plantation project, as of the later works project, could be considered nil in the sense that the laborers under any condition require subsistence.

The unbalanced agriculture of the South has involved not only periods of forced idleness but also rush periods of cultivation or harvesting, with



women and children meeting the labor deficit. In fact, excessive ruralism has caused an unusual amount of labor to fall to the lot of women in this region of chivalry. There is a comment handed down from horse and buggy days through aristocratic planter channels to the effect that the men and horses went to town every day, while the women and mules remained at home and worked. The hillbilly counterpart is a story of a man's saying that he did not mind seeing women cook, scrub floors, or draw and carry water, but he could not stand to see them cut wood; in fact, when his wife started such an undertaking he always had to leave the house to keep from witnessing the performance.

The South is diverse in geography, agriculture, and industry. But it is not divided today between planters and hillbillies or between whites

and Negroes on any basis of sectional segregation. There has been a wide exchange of population between up-country and low-country. Hillbillies are not limited to the highlands. They have moved into the lowlands, to cities, and to other regions, often leaving naked fields abandoned to the healing processes of nature, until misfortune might force them back to refuge in the hills. The up-country in the twentieth century has received an influx of Negroes from the lowlands, many of them becoming hill-country farmers. "Hillbilly" might be enlarged to embrace types of both races, which are pretty well diffused over the hills and valleys and towns of the South.

This civilization, considered in a broad democratic sense, is at the national bottom on all statistical comparisons of wealth, production and culture. It reflects a low per capita income whether measured in cash or in terms of subsistence. It has a comparative shortage of dollars, livestock, poultry and other things. There are many Southern counties in which the gross income per farm inhabitant for such a year as 1929 was less than \$100, including the value of farm products consumed in the home. With such low income in the period of prosperity, it is not surprising that during the depression a large proportion of the South's rural population was forced into relief. Farmer independence or self-sufficiency became a myth. The Southern states rank lowest in number of physicians. South Carolina had more than 1,500 inhabitants and Alabama had more than 1,300 per physician in 1936, while the average for the United States was one physician for every 778 inhabitants. Midwives deliver a large proportion of the numerous babies born in the South. Hookworm, malaria, and other preventable ailments, though reduced, are far from negligible. WPA authorities found that practically every family examined for admission to the Arkansas farm colony of Dyess had one or more energy-sapping diseases.

It seems somewhat futile for the Southern champions of "agrarianism" and their opposing advocates of an industrial way of life to argue the issues which divide them, because the South is widely lacking in what either group would wish it to have. The section is so short in subsistence farming and so low in cash farming, that argument for more of one does not cut under the argument for the other. Southerners can no longer ask to be let alone to solve their own problems and then not solve them. The problems offer a challenge and must be faced, locally and nationally. There are the issues of poverty, illiteracy, and race relations, which are closer together than is always assumed. But these hinge on the problems of material productivity, distribution, and well-being, which, in turn, hinge largely on a solution of the ills of farm tenancy in the light of the machine age and on a reduction of that kind of rural commerce which farms the farmer.

